HITLER'S SWEDES

A HISTORY OF THE SWEDISH VOLUNTEERS IN THE WAFFEN-SS

LARS T. LARSSON

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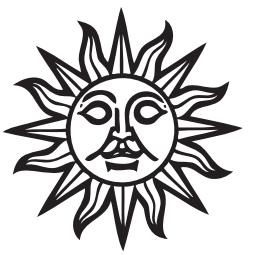

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Cover: Front cover – Sitting on the half-track to the right is the inexperienced and unpopular platoon leader Gunnar Eklöf. (Bosse B. archive). Rear cover – The group of Swedes at the Breslau camp, including Gösta Borg, Ragnar Linnér, Kurt Lundin, Frans Wahlberg and Lars Forssberg. (Bosse B. archive)

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Introduction & Acknowledgements

What you are holding in your hands now is the first book I have ever written. My interest in the Swedish *SS* volunteers started when I was about 13 years old. By then I was already quite interested in the Second World War and especially the German armed forces, and as I found out that some of my fellow countrymen had served in the *Waffen-SS*, my interest turned towards them. However, at that time not much had been written about them, consequently a few years later I started visiting archives and doing research myself to learn more about the subject.

The idea to write a book came about a few years ago. I had gathered large quantities of archival material, and as I realized there was no book that provided a detailed study of the Swedish *SS* volunteers I decided to write one myself – this book is the result.

What I realized during my research was that I was dealing with human beings. They were not merely a rank with a service assignment, but people with different backgrounds who, for different reasons, chose an unusual life – to voluntary participate in a war which was not their own in any kind of way. Thus I have not only attempted to deal with their units, but also with them as individuals, and tried to give some insight into who they were, what motivated them, what they experienced and how their service ended.

This book is, to a large extent, based on the files kept by the Swedish police, which often included interrogations and other valuable material. One should note, however, that as the interrogations are the individuals telling their own stories they might not always be correct, hence I have made my best effort to check the information given by the volunteers against known events in order to pin down what is true and what is not. I hope that I have succeeded with this.

I also hope to have succeeded with my intention of presenting the story of the Swedish *SS* volunteers without supporting or judging them. I have no interest in supporting their decisions to fight for one of the world's most hated regimes, but I will not, at the same time, judge them for what they did as they lacked the knowledge about the Third Reich and its crimes that we have today. Simply put, while I do not defend what they did I believe it would be wrong to judge them in retrospective.

Lastly, I'd like to add a "thanks from the author". First off, to my father Anders, who by some strange reason thought it was good idea to give his then five year old son a picture book about German paratroopers, which fired my interest. I would also like to thank my family as whole, especially my sister Linnéa, who have been a great support; my publisher, Duncan Rogers, who found my manuscript interesting enough to publish; my friends with whom I share my interest, and who have helped me greatly along the road with both valuable insights and material: Petter Kjellander, Predrag Blanusa, Bosse B., Göran Hargestam, Simon Olsson, Anders Frankson, Martin Månsson, Lars Gyllenhaal, Geir Brenden, Charles Trang and Marc Rikmenspoel. Despite their help, if anything remains incorrect it is because of me and no-one else. The families of Swedish *SS*-veterans provided me with information concerning their relatives, for which I thank them. Also, I would like to add many thanks to my closest friends who have made sure that I have also done other things in life beyond sitting in front of the computer writing about events which occurred over 70 years ago: Mika Kokkonen, Tolga Deniz, Johan Kornefalk, Rickard Jonsson and Andreas Johansson.

Sweden, 14 June 2012
Lars T. Larsson

1

Introduction – Sweden and the Second World War

Modern Sweden – A Brief History to 1939

Today Sweden is primarily known for Ikea, high tax-rates and the Nobel Prize. At one time, however, it was a major European power well-known for its royal house, Carolingian soldiers and numerous battlefield victories. Indeed, Sweden was, in stark contrast to its recent history, a warlike nation that took part in a wide-ranging series of conflicts – mainly but not exclusively against Russia and Denmark – between 1521 and 1721. The army was, following the death of the martial King Charles XII in 1718, disbanded and settlements reached (Treaty of Nystad 1721) with traditional enemies. Sweden's era of regional dominance thus came to an end. The impact of later continental conflicts would however continue. Indeed, Sweden was forced to cede Finland to Russia following the war of 1808-1809, Three years later, Sweden participated in the Sixth Coalition War which pitted Great Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria against Napoleonic France and its allies. The subsequent victory over the First Empire (1814) was succeeded by a campaign against Norwegian independence. The latter, in the immediate aftermath of a short conflict, was forced into union with Sweden and a peace that lasted until the 91-year-old agreement was dissolved without incident in 1905. A further step toward modern democratic development occurred two years later when male suffrage was introduced throughout Sweden. The First World War broke out nine years after Norwegian independence. Declaring strict neutrality, Sweden maintained its stance throughout the conflict. The interwar period was notable for the granting of women's' suffrage and the reduction of the statutory working week. It was also a time of economic crisis that resulted in mass unemployment and, in the mid-1920s, the reduction of the armed forces. The world-wide depression and the subsequent 'Kreuger Crash' of 1932'[1] brought about more serious economic woes. This instability, coupled with the growing threat of another European war, led to the a governmental decision to boost Sweden's military.

Sweden and the Second World War

As with the First World War, Sweden declared neutrality following the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. A total of 20 nations made the same choice, but only eight would maintain their neutrality. The only divergence from this stance occurred when Sweden declared a "non-combatant' status in a show of support to Finland during the Winter War. Military aid (weapons, ammunition and volunteers) was despatched to the beleaguered Finns who subsequently managed to avoid total

1 Resulting from the financial collapse of financier, entrepreneur and industrialist Ivar Kreuger's (1880-1932) vast business empire.

occupation until a cease-fire was declared on 13 March 1940 – the danger had been temporarily averted.

The Scandinavian calm would prove short-lived, for on 9 April Germany invaded neighbouring Denmark and Norway. The former capitulated without much resistance, while the latter carried on the struggle with British and French assistance until early June. By that time Germany was completing its lightning conquest of France and the Low Countries. Democratic Sweden found itself, now that most of western and northwest Europe was in Nazi hands, an isolated island in a stormy sea.

The Swedish government was, in contrast to its attitude toward Finland during the Winter War, not keen on providing military aid to Norway. It was fear of German aggression that prevented intervention of the kind provided in 1939. Sweden, having denied Germany access to its internal rail system throughout the late Norwegian campaign, adjusted its neutral stance in the immediate aftermath of the German victory by allowing military leave trains passage through Swedish sovereign territory.

The neutrality question worsened in June 1941 following Barbarossa. Germany demanded, in addition to Swedish alignment with the Axis powers, permission to transport men and guns through Sweden in order to reinforce the reactivated Finnish front. Known as the 'Midsummer Crisis', it was subsequently decided to grant a one-time only rite of railway passage to a *Wehrmacht* division. However, the above-mentioned leave trains – on which many volunteers travelled to European training camps – continued unabated. Ready acceptance of this German demand met with a great deal of overt hostility. The government responded by forbidding press criticism in order to avert a rift in Swedish society.

The war turned in the Allies' favour in 1943. It was in August of that year that German leave trains were denied passage over Swedish territory. Swedish governmental support for the Western Allies commenced not long afterwards when secret espionage and sabotage bases were permitted to be established along the shared border with Norway. Swedish authorities also allowed for the raising of 'Police Troops' amongst Norwegian refugees despite the fact that these men were actually soldiers bent on liberating their homeland. Attired in Allied uniform, armed with allied weapons and trained on Swedish soil, their numbers at peak strength amounted to a full infantry division. The US Army Air Force was also granted to use an air base in Northern Sweden. The flying crews wore American uniforms and flew supplies to the clandestine bases on the Norwegian-Swedish border. Plans were also drawn up to fly the aforementioned police troops to Norway if required.

Sweden had trade agreements with both Germany and the Western Allies during the war. Supplying, amongst other raw materials, immense quantities of ball-bearings and iron ore, this willingness to serve both sides was a ploy to remain outside the conflict. Nevertheless, a total of 23 belligerent aircraft (15 German and 8 Allied) were shot down for violating Swedish airspace. A large number, amongst which were allied bombers damaged during air raids over the Reich, made forced landings.

Professed neutrality did not prevent Swedish fatalities. One Swedish soldier was killed by strafing German aircraft, but most wartime related deaths occurred at sea, the merchant navy sustaining some 1,300 killed, the fishing fleet and naval forces suffering approximately 100 dead each.

Bellicose Swedes

Swedish neutrality was not accepted by all it citizens. There were, in addition to those who politically opposed the government's policy, thousands more who decided to voluntarily participate in the war. Indeed, thousands of volunteers perpetuated the legacy of those who fought in the First World War, Finnish Civil War, Estonian War of independence and Spanish Civil War.

Finland

Questions about Winter War volunteers were raised early on. Considered a "brother nation" under threat, many Swedes sympathised with Finland's defensive war against the "giant from the east". Despite what appeared to be overwhelming odds, the conflict bore emotive comparison to a David and Goliath struggle. Thousands of Swedes expressed a readiness to support their perceived brothers weapons in hand. The question of voluntarily participation was first raised when the Soviet Union absorbed the Baltic States. This resulted in the formation of a 'Swedish Volunteer Corps'. Divided into three distinct groups of which two would see active combat against the Red Army. A total of around 13,000 Swedes, of which 8,200 were accepted, expressed the desire to participate in the conflict. Subsequent volunteers for the *Waffen-SS* often engaged the Red Army in combat for the first time as members of the Volunteer Corps.

The Winter War over, the majority of volunteers returned home. Finland's participation in the Continuation War provided another opportunity for volunteers to join the anti-Bolshevik crusade. This was not a defensive conflict; Finnish forces now advanced eastward to retake territory lost in 1940. Qualms about this overt aggression failed to prevent the formation of a Swedish Volunteer Battalion on the static Hanko Front. These volunteers were allowed to return home following the liberation of Hanko in December 1941. Some 4,000 Swedes had applied to join; 800 were accepted. The screening process was rigorous, more applicants being turned away then during the 1939-40 conflict. Others chose the alternative path by enlisting in the Finnish regular army.

A new volunteer unit (one company only) was raised in 1942. Serving on the Svir River Front, its 400 men participated in the largest battle (Tali-Ihantala 1944) on Scandinavian soil. Survivors returned following the armistice.

Swedish volunteers in Finland during the Winter War in 1939-40. Included in the group are Erik Wallin, Hans Lindén and Fred Nilsson, who were childhood friends from Stockholm and later came to join the *SS*. (Bosse B. archive)

Volunteers in Anglo-American, Soviet and Norwegian Service

Thousands of volunteers served in the Anglo-American forces. This might seem odd given that cultural ties to Germany were considerably stronger than contemporary Anglophone connections. Indeed, it was common for Swedes to speak German rather than English during this period.

It has been estimated that around 9,000 Swedes served with the Western Allies. Many, although serving in different naval forces such as the merchant fleet, wore allied military uniforms and were awarded foreign combat decorations. Others participated in combat, approximately 30 serving in the British armed forces assignments ranging from fighter pilot to commando. Approximately 16 left home to enlist in the United States armed forces. **Thord Bergstrand's** experience is perhaps the most unique**.** Returning home after two and one-half years' service with the *Waffen-SS*, he was readily recruited into the US military police!

Some volunteers chose Russian service. Never amounting to more than a handful, the majority had immigrated to the Soviet Union prior to the war. Approximately 300 volunteers – some of which were, oddly enough, National Socialists – defied government policy to form a Norwegian volunteer unit in 1940.

2

Swedish National Socialism

It is necessary, before beginning an investigation into the Swedish *SS* volunteers, to survey the indigenous National Socialist movement of the day. Despite the general consensus amongst veterans that they enlisted to fight against Stalin and not for Hitler, it cannot be denied that the majority were party members or Nazi sympathizers.

National Socialism in Sweden can be traced back to the 1920's and the general political climate in Europe. In 1924, the *Swedish National Socialist Freedom League* was established with **Birger Furugård** as the leader. The party encountered public hostility during its early meetings in the form of verbal abuse and violent confrontations with political opponents. In addition, rival Fascist organizations such as *National Coalition Movement* from which the "*Fascist Struggle Organisation of Sweden*" (SFKO) was formed, were also in existence. Within SFKO, **Sven-Olof Lindholm** held the leading political role and together with **Furugård** and the *Neo-Swedish Covenant* from Gothenburg, a merger occurred in 1930. The result was the *Neo-Swedish National Socialist League* or NSF. **Furugård** assumed the leadership role whilst **Lindholm** served as his deputy. The party was often eponymously referred to as the *Furugård Party*. The new party sought to spread the word among Swedish National Socialists by organizing propaganda tours and lectures. It also planned to invite **Adolf Hitler** and **Joseph Goebbels** to speak, but these plans met with resistance and were shelved.

The 1932 parliamentary election results proved to be a fiasco, the party failing to win a single seat. A serious rift emerged between **Furugård** and **Lindholm** the following year, the latter and his supporters being expelled from the party. They chose instead to form the *National Socialist Workers Party* (*NSAP)*. The Swedish National Socialist movement thus fragmented, an attempt to form a united front was attempted with the creation of the *National Socialist Bloc* (*NSB*) with the legendary **Martin Ekström** at its head. During his lifetime, **Ekström** participated in at least five conflicts (Persian, World War I, the Finnish Civil war, Estonian War of Independence and Finnish Front). A rabid anti-Communist, he also planned to recruit Swedes into the *Waffen-SS*. This scheme, however, never got beyond the planning stage.[1]

The *NSB*, however, failed to attract prerequisite numbers thus allowing the rival *NSAP* to expand into the leading Swedish National Socialist party. The party organised the Swedish equivalent of the Hitler Youth – *"Nordisk Ungdom" (Nordic youth, NU)*. Open to both boys and girls, it established in 1933. Prevailing public hostility contributed to the need for heightened security measures during *NSAP* gatherings. This resulted in the organisation of so-called *Skyddsavdelningen* (Protection squads, or *SA* in short) around New Year 1934. During the years 1933-38, the party held a number of propaganda tours, distributed the party organ *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* (*The Swedish People's Socialist*) and put up posters. It also participated in the county council and municipal council elections (1933-34) during which it received a few seats. Approximately 20,000 votes were received during the parliamentary elections of 1936.

1 Wester, pp. 111–123.

Sven-Olof Lindholm, the leader of the NSAP, and later *SSS* party. The armband indicates this picture was taken before 1938 when the Swastika was abolished as the party symbol. (Erik R. archive)

Members of the NSAP parade through the streets of Stockholm announcing that leader Sven-Olof Lindholm is going to hold a speech the same day. (Erik R. archive)

Another major rift occurred in 1938. The result affected the *NSAP* for the remainder of its existence. The catalyst for conflict was the adoption of the familiar *Vasakärven* ('Sheaf of Vasa') in lieu of the Swastika. The wearing of the brown shirt, similar to that of the German SA, was also abandoned for the blue shirt. In addition, the party changed its name to *Svensksocialistisk Samling* ('Swedish Socialist Gathering'), or *SSS* for short. The change led to the resignation of several prominent members, who formed their own extremist organization known as *Solkorset* or 'Sun Wheel'. A number of its members would later join the *SS*. Despite these changes, the party continued to be strongly anti-Semitic and, amongst other activities, launched the notorious 'Jew Import' campaign during which they accumulated some 30,000 signatures of support.

The outbreak of war in 1939 was followed by cancellation of the propaganda tours and many party members were called up for military service. Increased domestic followed the invasions of Norway and Denmark in April 1940. Many felt that the *SSS* stood for the invaders of perceived "brother nations". In response, the party advertised themselves as a political party free of ties with Germany. Nevertheless, *SSS* propaganda tours and speeches were often met with both verbal and physical disapprobation that nearly descended into riot. The party itself would describe the early (1940-41) war years as the most difficult. Nevertheless, it still managed to publish *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* without interruption. Refusal to participate in national politics was demonstrated by its failure to enter the political race in 1940 and 1942 respectively. Several of the party members enlisted as volunteers for hard-pressed Finland in 1939 and, following the outbreak of the Continuation War, once again came to the same decision. It must, however, be stressed that far from every volunteer was an *SSS* member or sympathized with its ideology. In a shell hole on the Hanko Front on 3 August 1941, a group of party members felt the need to establish an equivalent front line organization. This became the *Sveaborg*, which later also came to include several *SS* volunteers amongst its ranks. This resulted in an organisational division; one for Finland and one for those serving with the *SS*. The latter was named *Fighting Unit Hans Lindén* in memory of ***SS-Sturmmann*** **Hans Lindén**. When prominent Finnish volunteer **Gösta Hallberg-Cuula** was killed on 14 April 1942, it was decided to convert that day into one of remembrance. Christened *Day of the Fallen,* it is celebrated at the grave of **Hallberg-Cuula** by different national organizations to this day. During the post-war years, *Sveaborg* provided the organisational basis for the *Stay Behind* movement (see the Chapter "Post-war history of the Swedish *SS* volunteers"). Amongst their ranks were several Swedish former *SS* volunteers.

The *SSS* continued to make attempts to establish themselves as one of the larger national parties after the war. It was not until 6 June 1950 (Swedish National Day) that the party was officially disbanded. Its erstwhile leader **Sven-Olof Lindholm** retreated from the political scene, but is said to have voted for the Swedish communist party. He died in 1998.

In addition to the larger and more popular (*NSAP/SSS, NSB* and *SNSP*) several other organisations were of national socialist character. A contemporary Swedish police document lists them as follows:

- *Svensk Opposition* (Swedish Opposition*)*
- *Socialistiska Partiet*, SP (The Socialistic Party)
- *Solkorset* (Sun Wheel)
- *Sveriges Nationella Förbund* (SNF) Sweden National Alliance
- *Engelbrektsförbundet* (Engelbrekt Alliance*)*
- *Svenska Aktiva Studentförbundet* (*SAK*) Swedish active student alliance
- *Tyska Klubben* (German Club)

Despite the many different organizations, National Socialism remained unpopular in Sweden, and had little or no real influence on the political spectrum. Moreover, German authorities did not respond well to their Swedish-born compatriots. One *SD* officer, while compiling an analysis of the various Swedish national socialist parties, observed they would rather fight each other and considered **Sven-Olof Lindholm** to be a "personally quite incapable" man.

3

The *Waffen-SS*: A Brief History

Early Years

The *SS* under leadership of ***Reichsführer-SS*** **Heinrich Himmler** grew from a small bodyguard unit of the *NSDAP*-party to a monolithic organization complete with a mass of sub-organizations, including, amongst other administrative offices, concentration camps, police, security police, security service and its own armed fighting force – the *Waffen-SS*. The latter was one of the most well-known arms of the organization, and grew from a few regiments during the early war years to 38 divisions by 1945. It is believed that around one million men passed through the ranks of the *Waffen-SS*, and of these, about 150 were Swedish volunteers, who chose by their own free will to leave a relatively secure neutral country to fight for **Adolf Hitler** and the Third Reich**.**

The origin of the *Waffen-SS* can be traced back to the 120 man strong bodyguard raised, under the leadership of **Sepp Dietrich**, in 1933. A few months later the organization had risen to some 800 men. This unit became the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* during 1934, and participated in the purge against the *Sturmabteilung (SA)* – 'The night of the Long Knives' that same year. The power of the *SA* eliminated, the *SS* became a separate organization free of its earlier attachment to the former. During the fall of 1934, **Hitler** approved of the creation of the armed *SS*. Thus the armed force of the *NSDAP* party was born. The new organization was named *SS Verfügungstruppen* (*SS*-VT) and would initially consist of two *'Standarten (regiments) – Germania'* and *'Deutschland'*.

This created a need for *SS* officers, which had earlier been recruited from the *Reichswehr* and the police. Hence it was decided to establish two, *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* and Braunschweig, officer training schools. Former *Reichswehr*-general **Paul Hausser** was appointed as inspector of the *SS-VT* in order to form it into a formidable fighting force. An additional *'Der Führer'* regiment was formed following the annexation of Austria in 1938. These new units, however, remained unproved in combat; this would change during the invasion of Poland in 1939.

First Actions: 1939-1940

In the weeks prior to the invasion of Poland, the *SS-VT* and the *LSSAH* was placed under tactical command of the *OKH* (Army high command). Following the campaign, the first *SS*-Division was created. Known as the *SS Verfügungs Division*, consisting of the '*Germania', 'Deutschland'* and '*Der Führer'* regiments, the *LSSAH* participated as an independent regiment. Their early combat performance was mixed, and the OKW (Armed Forces High Command) petitioned to have the units disbanded. This request, which appeared to have its origins in institutional fears of a rival organization to the *Wehrmacht*, was denied. It was instead decided to enlarge the organization by two – the *SS Totenkopf* and the *SS Polizei* – divisions. This was also a result of serious competition between the army and the *SS* over recruitment of available German youth. Despite having a limited recruiting pool, the latter was free to glean men from their own ranks. Indeed, the

SS Totenkopfverbände and *Polizei*, as organizations within the *SS*, were available as a ready source of available manpower. It was these circumstances, combined with *SS* racial theories and beliefs, that eventually led to the large recruitment amongst foreign volunteers.

Subsequent expansion led to the creation of motorized artillery battalions per division in March 1940. Lack of cooperation by the *Wehrmacht* ensured the formation went slow. It was decided, following the successful invasions of Denmark and Norway, to create regiment '*Nordland',* which was hoped to be a racially pure Nordic volunteer regiment.. While *'Nordland'* would have its baptism of fire over a year later, the rest of the armed *SS* units turned west.

The performance of the new *SS*-formations during the conquest of France and the Low Countries was also mixed. While some units performed well, others, including the newly created *Polizei-Division,* did not. This somewhat indifferent result, however, did not affect the overall status of the *SS-Verfügungstruppe*, which during that year became known as '*Waffen-SS'* or armed *SS.* Expansion quick followed when it was decided to create yet another (*'Westland'*) regiment which was to incorporate racially fit volunteers from Western European countries.

It was decided, in the autumn of 1940, that *'Westland', 'Nordland'* and the battle-proven *'Germania'* regiments were formed into what would become the *'Wiking' Division* – an important formation to the Swedish volunteers. General recruitment for the division went slow because of the *Molotov-Ribbentrop* non-aggression pact, which made *SS* service an anathema to Europeans dedicated to fighting communism.

1941-45

Nazi Germany became involved in in the Balkans following the failed Italian attack in spring 1941. The *LSSAH* and the *Reich Division (*later *Das Reich*) fought in the campaign with great gallantry. This was however only a diversion; the true goal, in the eyes of **Heinrich Himmler**, was to defeat National Socialism's ideological enemy – the Soviet Union. This commenced with Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941. Indeed, this truly ideological war, would go a long way to establishing the fear in which the *SS* was held. The Slavic enemy was considered *'untermensch'* (subhuman) by the 'superior' Germanic race. The war in the east quickly descended into one of the bloodiest military campaigns in history in both military and civilian casualities. Its long and costly course resulted in the formation of additional *SS* formations/units in which foreign volunteers subsequently enlisted. Serving in *'Wiking' Division* and numerous volunteer 'Legions, they were also recruited for the *6th SS Division,* mountain division *Nord*', which had originally consisted of *Totenkopf* regiments, and, in addition, two infantry brigades and a cavalry brigade created from second class troops from *SS Totenkopf Standarten* and the *SS-Totenkopf Reiter Standarten*.

The expansion continued during 1942, when two (*7th* '*Prinz Eugen'* and *8th* '*Florian Geyer'*) new divisions were raised as mountain and cavalry formations respectively. In addition, some of the early divisions were re-equipped as *SS Panzergrenadier* divisions. The expansion continued throughout 1943, with a further eight divisions being formed.[1] These included *'Frundsberg', 'Hohenstaufen', 'Nordland', 'Hitlerjugend', 'Handschar'* (a mountain division consisting of Bosnian Muslims), 14th Ukrainian, 15th Latvian, and *Panzergrenadier Division 'Reichsführer SS'*. It is noteworthy that some of these formations were raised from 'racially-impure" elements. Expansion was followed by further re-equipping when '*LSSAH', 'Das Reich', 'Totenkopf'* and '*Wiking'* divisions to full-scale Panzer divisions in the fall of 1943.

More 'volunteer' divisions were raised during 1944-45. There personnel complements were even more non-Germanic than previously raised formations. However, many of these were draftees

1 '*Handschar'* was the first non-Germanic *SS*-Division.

from occupied countries. Their combat performance varied from good to downright poor, with desertions, mutiny and unwillingness to fight. It should also be noted that some of these divisions existed on paper only.

Rotating approximately one million men – of whom 253,000 were missing or killed in action – through its ranks, the *Waffen SS* had included some 38 divisions by May 1945.

SS Volunteers

The numerous *SS* volunteers who served in the ranks of the *Waffen-SS* during the Second World War remains a controversial topic. Some view the *Waffen-SS* as a pre-NATO pan-European army in the struggle against communism, a picture which is, all things considered, far from the truth.

The reasons for the recruitment are various: First, the logic – the Reich's need for manpower – was based on prevailing military logic. Second, political antecedents i.e., one must remember that the *Waffen SS*, as the arm of the *NSDAP* party, was also a political organization under the rule of National Socialism. Indeed, **Himmler** wanted to gather the entire "Germanic race" in the struggle against Bolshevism/Communism/world-wide Jewry. Most of the foreign volunteers wished to fight Communism as opposed to the Western Allies. This view was the primary recruitment lure, as the struggle against the anti-Bolshevik crusade was portrayed as a European cause. Simply put, **Himmler**'s scheme involved recruitment of European people in a race war against the Slavs, and while unable to mobilize entire countries the struggle, he could still find individuals willing to risk life and limb for the cause. This was especially true in occupied countries.

As the war progressed, racial demands were diluted, and even Slavs were able to join (or were forced to join), thus military necessity got the upper hand as casualties mounted. Nevertheless, many of these volunteers were still considered unworthy; non-Germanic formations were not permitted to wear the *SS*-runes, sporting divisional collar tabs. Ranks and divisional titles were written with the prefix '*Waffen'* instead of *SS.* For example, *Waffen Sturmmann* instead of ***SS-Sturmmann*** and *Waffen Grenadier-Division* instead of *SS Panzer Grenadier Division).*

Ironically, the amount of non-Germanic volunteers was far greater than the number of Germanic volunteers. Approximately 250,000 foreign citizens are believed to have served in the *SS*. Swedish volunteers were considered to be amongst the purest reserve of Germanic blood, according to Himmler. It is believed, although no certain numbers exist, that approximately 180-200 joined the *SS*, of whom about half saw frontline service. Not having indigenous units of their own, they remain relatively unknown when compared to the volunteers of other nations:

Netherlands – Approximately 25,000 volunteers of two divisions

Norway – Approximately 6,000 volunteers comprising a volunteer legion, a 'ski-ranger' battalion, police companies and *'Norge'* regiment; service in *'Wiking' Division* and other units also.

Denmark – Approximately 6,000 volunteers comprising a volunteer Legion, Regiment *'Danmark'* plus service in *'Wiking' Division*

Belgium –Approximately 16,000 volunteers; Flemish: Formed into Legion before being organized into a division. Walloon: *Wehrmacht* service followed by formation of their own *SS Sturmbrigade* and subsequent Division.

France – Approximately 20,000 volunteers serving in *Wehrmacht*; transferred to *SS* in 1943

Finland – Approximately 1,400 men serving with 3rd Battalion *'Nordland'* Regiment

Eastern European volunteers served in far greater numbers. While many of the Germanic volunteer units had – often in commanding positions – German nationals within their ranks, formations

recruited in the east were far more independent and homogenous. In regard to their numbers, two divisions of Latvian volunteers, one of Bosnian-Muslims, one of Ukrainians, one of Estonians, one of Albanians, two of Hungarians, two of Russians and one of Italians were raised during 1943-45. It should, however, be added that not all were organized to full division strength.

Their so-called volunteer status is also questionable. The Third Reich, as the need for manpower increased, took drastic measures by adopting wide-ranging recruiting methods including general draft. In other cases conscripts, although not considered racially fit, were permitted service with the *Wehrmacht*. It was not until the fall of 1943 that they were allowed (or forced) to transfer to the *SS*.

Most Swedish volunteers, despite subsequent claims to the contrary, joined the *SS* on their own free will. This is amply demonstrated by the legally or illegal crossing of frontiers before presenting themselves at a *SS* recruitment office.

War Crimes

While some *SS* divisions fought with distinction, often performing almost impossible tasks and scoring victories, it cannot be denied that the same units participated in a far dirtier war. Starting with the invasion of Poland in 1939, *SS* units participated in the murder of Polish civilians and Jews. More crimes, such as the Le Paradis massacre where soldiers from the *Totenkopf Division* murdered a large number of unarmed British POWs, occurred during the Western campaign of 1940.

This escalated during the war in the east. Prisoners of war, civilians and 'partisans' – often civilians who were written as partisans in reports – and, according to orders from the FHQ, Jews fell victim to *SS* divisions in their thousands. This was however not exclusive to the *SS*, as *Wehrmacht* units also participated in the atrocities. The Red Army, given the brutal nature of the war in the east (especially after reaching Germany), also performed its share of war crimes, which only further escalated the bloody spiral that was the Eastern Front. Mass murder, mass rape and looting were rampant. In short, all participants had blood on their hands.

The opening of the second front in the west in June 1944 was followed by crimes on a comparatively smaller scale when civilians – for example during the infamous Oradour-sur-Glane massacre – were executed en masse by *Das Reich Division*. Enemy POWs, like the men of a US Army artillery observation unit shot down by the *LSSAH* in December 1944, were also victims of their *SS* captors.

The notorious concentration camp system and *Einsatzgruppen* performed mass murder on a industrial scale. Organizationally placed beneath the *Waffen-SS, the SS-Totenkopfverbände* oversaw the genocide. Frequent rotation of camp personnel with frontline divisions occurred. It was not uncommon for wounded or unfit personnel to be rotated into these formations. For example, the infamous **Dr Josef Mengele** served with the *'Wiking' Division* prior to being transferred to Auschwitz. Although officially a fighting force, the *Waffen-SS* provided support to the *Einsatzgruppen* and *Totenkopfverbände* with the bloody mission to carry out **Himmler's** racial war.

4

Recruitment in Sweden

There was, as the reader will note, no active or authorized recruitment of *SS* volunteers in Sweden. The Germans did however make diplomatic efforts for permission to recruit Swedish nationals, and there were also some private initiatives to establish enlistment offices in Sweden. Primarily connected with *'Wiking' Division*, these initiatives are related in Chapter about the Swedish volunteers in the *'Wiking' Division*. There were however also two private initiatives that never gained ground, but still deserve mention. The most common way for a Swede to receive recruitment information was through Stockholm's German Legation. This was more often than not the first step and hence contact between the legation and individual volunteers is worthy of investigation as well.

The German Legation and Swedish Volunteers

As previously related, many volunteers paid personal visits to the German Legation in order to explore possible paths to recruitment. Previous diplomatic attempts to enlist Swedish nationals having failed, legation officials were confined to providing specific informational services only. They could however offer general assignments connected with those already serving within the *SS*. Those wishing to serve as volunteers had to arrange ways to pass into occupied Norway where enlistment was no issue. Some volunteers later claimed that the legation supplied them with money for travel expenses. Swedish ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Kurt Birger Norberg** recollected following his return in 1943:

> Organized recruitment is unlikely to occur in Sweden ... Most commonly, the volunteer himself appears at the German Legation and is by *Ländergruppenleiter* Stengel (German consular official, *SS-Oberscharführer* in the *Waffen-SS*) provided with travel money to the Norwegian or Finnish borders.

This claim concerning funding – which according to **Norberg**, was "off the books" – remains unsupported by subsequent interrogations and tapped phone conversations. The Legation was also responsible for the distribution of volunteer salaries and provided aid for their families.[1] In addition, the Legation also paid-off volunteer deserters who successfully made their way back to Sweden despite the fact that they would be subjected to the tender mercies of German military law (often resulting in execution) on returning to Germany or any of the occupied countries.

The Legation also provided volunteers with Norwegian visas which, in the absence of Swedish travelling permits, were not sufficient documentation for legal immigration. Swedish law did not allow recruitment on its sovereign territory, but it was not illegal for individuals to join a foreign army, why only those who held passports and was not participating in active military service were free to leave if they wanted. This was a fact ignored by the Legation, which continued to issue

1 Referat över ett Sveaborgsmöte, som hölls på Markvardagatan 5 den 21 september 1943. Sid 1-3. (RA)

visas to whomever they found fit despite being fully aware of the motives and the legal state of the volunteer. For example, Swedish commissioned officer **Rune Ahlgren,** who visited the Legation in September 1942, requested a visa to visit German occupied Norway. In the application, he clearly stated the reason for the request: "*Waffen-SS*".[2]

It is also interesting to note that another volunteer, **Gösta Borg,** who served in the *SS* in 1941 and enlisted for a second time in 1943, appears to have been discouraged by the Legation staff.[3] This is however the only case I have been able to find and should be considered as the sole exception.

At the close of 1944 there was some confusion amongst the legation staff concerning recruitment. It appears *SS-Hauptamt* or *SS* main office, requested the start of recruitment on Swedish soil. The details of this contemplated programme remain somewhat imprecise, the Legation staff being under the impression that they were expected to recruit Finnish refugees who had fled to Sweden during the Winter War of 1939-40 and the ceasefire between the Soviet union and the Finns in September 1944. Things became even more confusing when Swedish-born ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Olof Sandström** of the *SS-Hauptamt* arrived to assist the Legation with the recruitment of both Finnish and Swedish volunteers. This incident is related in the Chapter about Swedish non-combatants.[4]

Private Recruitment Initiatives

Several private recruitment initiatives were instituted. As previously stated, those that actually succeeded were connected to recruitment for *'Wiking' Division*, mainly the two groups of volunteers related to as the *'Hamilton Group'* and the *"Eklöf Group",* which were dispatched during summer 1941 and is thus presented in the Chapter about Swedish volunteers in the *'Wiking' Division*. This section will only feature two failed attempts, the first having some support from German authorities following the failed diplomatic discussions of 1941, and the second having origins amongst former volunteers.

Martin Ekström – 'Fearless Volunteer in Five Wars'

The first attempt occurred on the initiative of **Colonel Martin Ekström** in spring 1942. He was a very experienced soldier who, in total, would voluntarily participate in five different conflicts during his lifetime. His remarkable military career began in Persia during the 1910's. This was followed by service with the German Army during the First World War, subsequent participation in Finnish Civil War, Estonian War of Independence and finally as a volunteer in the Winter War of 1939-40. His political activism included an attempt – as the designated party chief – to create a unified National Socialist movement within Sweden during the 1930's. The peripatetic old soldier was also a personal friend of **Hermann Göring**. **Ekström** is, however, primarily remembered in Sweden for his anti-communist sentiments and not for the contemporaneous Fascist agenda that he advocated.

Ekström returned to the private sector in 1942; it was through subsequent business connections that he made frequent fact-finding trips to Germany in order to study, at **Göring's** express invitation, the Third Reich's bustling armament industry. It was probably while residing at Berlin's upscale Adlon Hotel that plans for the recruitment of Swedish volunteers was born.[5] The scheme

2 25 augusti 1943 P.M. till ärende XII 83 Ä. 2261. Sid 1. (MUST)
3 Interrogation of Sam Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)
4 Interrogation of Johannes Metzger, press attaché at the German legation in Stockholm. 25.10.45. (RA)
5 Ibid, p. 149.

was first outlined in a telegram from the German Legation in Helsinki to the German Foreign Ministry. Uninterested in pursuing men who had volunteered for Finland, **Ekström** was concerned with persuading potential volunteers by the means of written propaganda. Enlistees were to be gathered in Norway and transported to Germany for training.[6] However, no evidence has come to light that the contemplated recruiting scheme ever took concrete form. Indeed, **Ekström** ultimately eschewed service with the *SS* despite having fought against the Soviets in both Finnish conflicts.

The Stockholm Recruitment Office

Another group suspected of illegal recruitment was discovered in Stockholm in the spring of 1943. On 18 May the police followed up a report that a weapon had been discharged in the toilet of the Riche Restaurant. On arrival two ex-volunteers, **Fred Nilsson** and **Kurt Lundin,** were placed under arrest. **Nilsson** was carrying the pistol, but it was **Lundin** who mistakenly fired it. Compounding this confusion, the weapon actually belonged to a third party, **Åke Regnell,** who also had been a volunteer for a short time.[7]

One week later, the police received a confidential tip concerning an illegal recruitment office purportedly managed by the hapless trio. The editor of *Ny Dag* contacted the police after receipt of information that the office was housed in a flat owned by **Regnell**. One of the newspaper's journalists, working under cover, discovered that **Lundin** (the titular head of the organization) who had been despatched to recruit volunteers. The journalists lack of a valid passport was, **Lundin** stated, of no real concern and the German Legation would supply funds for accumulated travel expenses.

The trio also made contact with other former volunteers to ascertain if they had friends or relatives interested in serving abroad with the *SS*. Potential recruits were brought to the apartment and only granted entrance after demonstrating an arcane combination of knocks at the door.

Ny Dag was not the only paper to gather information about their activities. The magazine *Se* sent a reporter to look into the illegal recruitment matter. Feigning an abiding interest in voluntary service he accepted an offer to accompany **Nilsson** on a re-enlistment mission to Norway. On another occasion, they gathered at **Lundin's** home where they had study maps of the border area. The undercover journalist was also provided with instructions on how to act if detected by border patrols. One day prior to departure, the police took the three men into custody. Their subsequent interrogations produced the unconvincing claim that the sole purpose of their clandestine organisation was to field queries about *SS* service.

Subsequent criminal charges were based solely on the testimonies of the two journalists. The defence descended into farce when the trio put forth the dubious explanation that they had no real interest in the cause and only wanted see how far they could go before discovery. The authorities, having no evidence of any volunteers actually being recruited, dismissed the charges in district court and the court of appeals. Illegal discharge of a firearm and its consequent petty fine was the only charge handed down.[8]

6 Telegram from German Legation, Helsinki to the German Foriegn Ministry. Signed Bluecher. 5.2.42. (Author's archive)

7 Information concerning their previous service *SS* service can be found in the chapters 5 and 7.

8 Bernhardsson, pp. 474-85.

5

Swedish Volunteers in 5th *SS* Division *'Wiking'*

INTRODUCTION

The Division that eventually became *5. SS-Panzer Division* '*Wiking*' was the formation in which the largest number of the Swedish volunteers served during the Second World War. This was especially true for the period 1941-43. The majority would serve with *11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Nordland'*, a formation raised from the *'Wiking' Division* regiment *'Nordland',* after 1943. '*Wiking*' was first envisaged in spring 1940 as a foreign volunteer formation. The *Waffen-SS*, limited by a quota of potential German-born recruits, resulted in efforts to recruit volunteers from Scandinavian-occupied countries of Europe, among others. In addition, following the racial belives of **Himmler,** it was important to gather the "Germanic" blood in the *SS* – and thereby creating the foundation for the later Great Germanic Reich, which was to follow after a German victory. Thus, **Himmler** issued orders for the formation of *SS Infanterie-Standarte 'Nordland'* following the invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, which would consist of 50% Germans and 50% Danish and Norwegian complement.

'Nordland' was, following the conclusion of the Western campaign, followed by sister regiment *SS Infanterie Standarte* '*Westland'* on 15 June 1940. The idea was that Scandinavian volunteers would serve in '*Nordland'* whilst the newly-raised *'Westland'* was conceived for Western – primarily Netherlands – European volunteers.[1]

The first documented discussions, as far as can be ascertained, concerning Swedish recruitment for *'Nordland'* occurred between chief *SS* recruiting officer **Gottlob Berger** and *Reichsführer* **Heinrich Himmler** in August 1940. **Himmler** concurred with the former that Swedish nationals would be granted *SS* service, but stipulated that the issue had to be brought up with the foreign ministry which would contact the Swedish government.[2] This placed the prospective volunteers in a different category in that they would not be recruited from occupied countries.

Initial recruitment of European volunteers proceeded slowly as Germany was still bound by the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact which made the *Waffen-SS* seem an unlikely draw for recruits with anti-communist sentiments. Moreover, the demanding enlistment requirements ensured many others were ruled out. Indeed, the ideal recruit was at least 170cm tall and 17-23 years of age with no criminal record.

Himmler received permission from **Hitler** to create a full-scale division of Germanic volunteers in the fall of 1940. *SS Infanterie Regiment 'Germania'*, one of the original *SS* Regiments, was transferred from *SS Verfügungs-Division* to establish the framework for *SS-Division (Motorisiert)*

1 Rikmenspoel, p. 84.

2 Telegram 'Betr. Werbung in Schweden', Persönlicher Stab RFSS. Berlin, 4.9.40. (Author's archive)

'Germania' in addition to *'Westland'* and *'Nordland'*.[3] *Rgt. 'Germania'* which had been a part of the first *SS* Division was, having seen action in Poland and France, an experienced combat unit. It was also decided to create (*SS-Artillerie-Regiment 5*) a component artillery unit. The division title remained until late December of that year when it was renamed *SS Division (mot.) 'Wiking'*. **Felix Steiner**, former commander of *SS Infanterie Regiment. 'Deutschland'* was appointed commander. Originally conceived as a volunteer unit, the majority of the Division's personal would be of German and ethnic Germans of the so-called '*Volksdeutsche*'.

1941: The First Swedish *'Wikings'*

Notorious Norwegian National Socialistic leader **Vidkun Quisling** urged Norwegian youth to join *SS-Standarte 'Nordland'* in a radio broadcast speech in January 1941. He did not speak of the potential Soviet menace, but rather of war between Germany and Great Britain and argued that the former would be victorious regardless of Norwegian participation. Failure to join the conflict, he concluded, would stain Norway's reputation in the Pan-Germanic European order to come. Some joined, but the overall response was lukewarm and Swedish recruitment plans, at the request of the German consulate in Stockholm, was put on hold. This stance angered **Berger**, who bitterly remarked that the enlistment of some 200-300 Swedish volunteers was prevented due to bureaucratic interference.[4]

Meanwhile, the first inspired volunteers rushed to enlist in Norway. Swedish national **Frank Gustavsson** (b. 1923) decided to enlist in February 1941. The offspring of a Swedish father who immigrated to Norway where he got married, **Gustavsson** attended school after which he became a sailor. This was followed by service with *Organisation Todt* before returning to Norway in autumn 1940. Subsequent unemployment, coupled with hatred of communists and being generally impressed with the victories of the *Wehrmacht*, convinced him to choose the *SS* alternative whereupon he was sent to Graz for training.[5]

Meanwhile, Finnish authorities were contacted by their German counterparts regarding the mutually beneficial advantage of raising a Finnish volunteer Battalion for the *SS*. The proposed unit would eventually be incorporated into *'Wiking'*. **Gösta Borg**, on hearing rumours of the proposal, decided to investigate the possibility of joining the Battalion**.** His request denied, he continued his military Swedish military for a few more months.[6]

Borg was not the sole professional soldier to express an interest in *SS* enlistment prior to *Operation Barbarossa*. In May 1941, Swedish law enforcement authorities intercepted a letter to a Norwegian politician from Lieutenant **Åke Kretz**. In it he asked for a forged employment documents in order to join *'Nordland'*-Regiment. His motive was: if anything, altruistic:

> Even if I, on short notice, should be promoted to captain and my current annual income increased to around 10.000 Swedish crowns, I want to sacrifice this in order to help build a new Europe.[7]

3 Rikmenspoel. p.84.

4 Telegram ‚Betr. Ersatzgestellung für die *Waffen-SS*'. *Der RFSS Chef des SS-Hauptamtes*. Berlin, 19.2.41. (Author's archive)

5 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945. Concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Esbjörn. (MUST)

6 Interrogation of Gösta Borg. 12.5.45. P2557. (RA)

7 Letter from Åke Kretz to Professor B. Meidell, social departement, Oslo. 11.5.41. P2073. (RA)

The first Swedish national to join the *SS* in Norway – Frank Gustavsson shortly after joining. (Bosse B. archive)

Kretz never managed to leave Sweden. This was, however, not his first attempt to join the *SS*, inasmuch as he had already been granted the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer*.[8] The idea was that **Kretz** would act as Swedish recruitment officer for *'Wiking' Division* when possible.[9] Unable to leave Sweden for Norway, he volunteered to participate in the Continuation War in 1941.[10]

Correspondence emanating from 46 perspective '*Nordland'* candidates received at the Stockholm consulate ensured further discussion between **Berger** and **Himmler** continued into March. The oldest was 40 years of age; the youngest just 16. Amongst the correspondents were several who would join the *SS*.[11] The discussions would proceed at a somewhat leisurely pace until Operation Barbarossa. **Franz Wahlberg** (b. 1900) illegally crossed the Norwegian frontier in February. He was, having emigrated to South America following completion of Swedish military service and subsequent shipboard employment in the early 1920's, quite mature and urbane.[12] As with a number of other Swedish volunteers, he was a National Socialist and experienced professional soldier with previous service in the Finnish Civil War, Spanish Civil War and Winter War.[13] A member of the Swedish home guard since the 1930's, he held commission.[14] **Wahlberg** spent most

8 Telegram to *SS-Führungshauptamt*, 25.5.41. (NARA/BDC)
9 Telegram to *SS-Führungshauptamt*, 25.5.41. (NARA/BDC)
10 P.M. to ök. Sandell. 22/7 1941 and additional P.M., 23.7 and 26.7 1941. P2073. (RA)
11 Telegram. 'Betrifft Eintritt Schwedischer kriegsfreiwilliger in die *SS*-Standarte *"Nordland"*'. Stockholm, 19.3.41. (Author's archive)
12 Interrogation with Franz Rudolf Alfonso Wahlberg, 1.6.46. P4820. (RA)
13 Information related by *SS-Uscha*. Karl-Martin Ågrahn. P5642. (RA) and Compilation of Case Hd. 3660/40. P4820. (RA)
14 Case compilation Hd. 3660/40. P4820. (RA)

of the 1930's in Sweden, where he became an active member of the *NSAP* in 1933. Identifying with National Socialist philosophy whilst residing in the USA, combined with the fact that party leader **Sven-Olof Lindholm** was a personal friend from their school days, made him join his party.[15] It was a result of his ideological beliefs that he was forced to resign his civilian employment in 1938. This was the likely catalyst for entering into the Spanish conflict. Indeed, he appears to be one of the few Swedes who fought for **Francisco Franco's** Fascist cause. *SS* service not being the sole reason for crossing the border, **Wahlberg** found civilian employment on a supply ship serving the *Kriegsmarine* in Norwegian waters.[16]

In the beginning of March 1941, two young friends – **Hans Lindén** and **Fred Nilsson –** from Stockholm left home to enlist in the *SS*. This was not the first time they pursued service in a foreign Army. They had, in fact, left Sweden in 1940 to serve in anti-aircraft unit during the Winter War. **Nilsson** had done so without parental permission, but the two friends returned home unscathed following the ceasefire. Both found civilian employment afterwards. The lure of German service inspired the pair to contact the Reich consulate in 1941. Its unaccommodating officials stated the *SS* was not in need of volunteers. Undeterred, the pair contacted the Italian military attaché, who proved willing to discuss the matter. He insisted they join German forces, but promised them to investigate the possibility for them to join the Italian Army. Frustrated, they took **Vidkun Quisling's** call to Norwegian youth to heart by writing directly to the Norwegian Fascist. Receiving no answer, they wrote *Nasjonal Samling*, which in turn redirected their message to *SS* authorities. A subsequent reply, informing them that under the circumstances, Swedes could not be enlisted, was followed by final desperate attempt. Using their still valid passports issued for their service in Finland, they legally left Sweden on the morning of 3 March 1941 to try their luck.[17] Arriving in Norway, **Lindén** began a diary. He noted that he once again put a dream into reality: "Last year in the Finnish Army and now in Great German [army]." Paying a visit to the *SS*-recruitment office later that day, they were medically examined and accepted for service with *SS Standarte 'Nordland'* – the first Swedes according to the recruiters. **Lindén** remarked that he had no interest in throwing his youth away to become a junior official; his motives were, nonetheless, driven by ideals.[18] The pair also took the chance to correspond with their friend **Erik Wallin** who was still in Stockholm. They called on him to obtain a passport and join them but, as with the majority of boys their age, mostly commented on the attractive Norwegian girls encountered.[19]

Erik Wallin later became one of the most well-known of the Swedish *SS* volunteers. Having seen service in the Winter War, he contacted Swedish authorities to request a passport in April 1941. **Wallin**, the oldest of the trio, was born in 1921; **Lindén** and **Nilsson** in 1922 and 1923 respectively. **Wallin**, motivated by politics and a love for adventure, remarked he would not cross the frontier illegally if his request was denied. He was as good as his word when, unsurprisingly, the application was rejected.[20] The temporarily separated trio had grown up together in Stockholm and, according to a person acquainted to **Wallin,** he was a bit of a conformist, joining the *Nordic Youth* organization because others did so. **Wallin** claimed to have done so for the nature excursions. This was challenged in a subsequent newspaper article about volunteers in Finland where it was revealed he had been a youth leader.[21] **Lindén** came from a patriotic home; his sister was also

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Interrogation of Karl Fred Ingvar Nilsson, 28.5.43. P3742. (RA)
18 Hans Lindén diary. (Author's archive)
19 Hans Lindén and Fred Nilsson to Erik Wallin. 3.3.41. Oslo. (Author's archive)
20 Interrogation of Erik Stig Wallin. 29/3 1945. (RA)
21 Interrogation of Erik Stig Wallin. 19/7 1945. (RA)

The young Hans Lindén dressed in the uniform he wore whilst serving in a Finnish anti-aircraft. (Bosse B. archive)

Fred Nilsson. (Bosse B. archive)

heavily involved in the *Young Swedes* movement. **Lindén's** interest in politics dated back to his time at Stockholm's Södra Latin high school.[22]

Nilsson and **Lindén**, still knocking about Oslo, spent their time at their accommodations or sampling the capitol's café life. One morning the latter woke up to find his mate, no doubt subconsciously homesick, crying for his mother to bring him coffee in his sleep. One week passed before they were transferred, together with Norwegian volunteers, to Sennheim Camp for training. A rivalry soon developed between the various European volunteers, the Norwegian's harassing the pair over ancient territorial disputes between Norway and Sweden. The training included sports, singing, marching and politics. The notorious anti-Semitic propaganda film *"Der Ewige Jude"* was also screened one evening.[23]

The volunteers entrained for Graz on 1 April to begin weapons training. Departing for Heuberg on 12 April, their stay did not last long. Heuberg was where men were assigned to the to the various *Waffen-SS* branches. **Lindén** and **Nilsson**, based on previous service experience, were assigned to an anti-aircraft unit. Dispatched to a Weimar training camp, near *Buchenwald* concentration camp, they arrived on 27 April.[24] **Lindén** recorded first impressions in his diary:

> There are lots of prisoners here, German, Polish, Dutch and Jews, in all 10,000 men. They are dressed in striped clothes and marked with triangles of different colours, so that we are able to see what crimes they've committed. A distinction is made between political prisoners, professional criminals … repeat offenders and homosexuals. They are building a road and barracks here; teams of 20-30 men pulling large trailers loaded with rubble. The Jews have it the worst, as they have to carry large granite blocks all day.[25]

Nilsson fell ill at this time. Admitted to hospital on 28 April, the two friends parted forever. **Lindén** began his anti-aircraft training on the 16 May. Two days later he wrote his last diary entry. Having earlier written that the training would take approximately four weeks, it is more than likely he arrived at the front in time for *Operation Barbarossa*.[26] **Nilsson** took over his diary, but made no further entries. He remained in hospital for several months with scarlet fever.[27] In the meantime, the Division continued training and performed a successful live exercise. Entraining for Poland in May, it was clear the unproved formation was bound for a new war in the east. This impression was reinforced by the issue handbooks concerning the Soviet Union. More Swedes arrived during the last weeks of preparation.

Second Lieutenant **Are Laggberg** was a serving Swedish officer who legally travelled to Norway in May 1941.[28] He made, via the border town of Charlottenberg, his way to Oslo where he immediately enlisted. From 5 June 1941 he participated in a shortened officer candidate course at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* which was followed by promotion to *SS-Untersturmführer,* equal to the rank he held in Sweden.[29] His *SS* service was destined to be less than active due to rudimentary

22 P.M. concerning converstion with Hans Lindén's sister. 13.02.87. (Author's archive)
23 Hans Lindén diary. (Author's archive)
24 Hans Lindén diary. (Author's archive)
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid
27 Ibid.
28 P.M. to case Hd. 4624/41. P4237. (RA)
29 Telegram to *SS Führungshauptamt, amt für Führer Ausbildung Amt VII*. 7.7.41. (sent from Bad Tölz 2.7.41) signed *Der Kommandeur der Junkerschüle Bad Tölz* 'unknown name' *SS-Standartenführer*. (NARA/BDC)

understanding of the German language. Assigned to Klagenfurt camp as a reserve officer,[30] he successfully sought demobilization in October 1941 without having seen combat.[31]

Yngve Hellenborg, having learned that home enlistment was not possible from the German consulate, left Sweden for Norway in May 1941.[32] His background was somewhat complicated. Born the illegitimate son of a Swedish nobleman who rejected him, he was raised by a stepfather following the death of his mother in 1924.[33] **Hellenborg's** sympathy with National Socialism originated during his teenage years. Incensed, his stepfather threw him out and he was forced to seek employment. A short stint as a Finnish volunteer in Finland 1940 passed without experience of combat. Returning home, he claimed to have visited the British Consulate about becoming an RAF fighter pilot. The query remaining unanswered, military service with Regiment *Svea Livgarde* followed. Throughout his life he told falsehoods about employment with the Swedish security service and foreign ministry. These lies would become something of a signature that carried on into subsequent *SS* service. In June of 1941 he was sent to Sennheim for basic training.

Several of these early volunteers were not destined to serve with *'Wiking' Division* at the front or only experience service with the formation for a short time. An exception was **Elis Höglund**, who, in January 1941, visited the German Consulate to express his interest in *SS* service. His motives were political and, as he later explained in a short autobiography, he wanted to "fight for the new greater Germany".[34] Raised in an orphanage, his childhood had been harsh. Adopted at 11 years of age by a farm family on the Isle of Öland, he was abused often. A year passed before he was accepted into a stable home life. The adoptive family resided in a town where National Socialists had a strong foothold. Enlisting as a Winter War volunteer, he arrived too late to see action. Legally departure from Sweden in early June 1941 was obtained by deceit, **Höglund** claiming Norwegian employment in order to receive the desired travel permit.[35] **Ingmar Joelsson** (b. 1902) also joined the *SS* at this time.[36]

The Second World War would drastically change three weeks later with the start of *Operation Barbarossa.* This wanton act of aggression would transform into the world's largest and bloodiest land engagement. Here the *Wehrmacht* would suffer its greatest losses and the ultimate outcome of the war be decided. Some sources state 86% of all German losses were sustained on the Eastern Front. *'Wiking' Division* would serve there for the remainder of the conflict.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA JUNE-DECEMBER 1941

Diplomatic Wrangling and the Invasion of the Soviet Union – summer and fall 1941

The great "Crusade in the East" began on 22 June 1941. The war between Germany and the Soviet Union was no ordinary war but a war of two extreme ideologies, where the goal of the former was to crush what was perceived as the largest threat to western culture and to gain *Lebensraum* – living space for the greater German empire. The conflict descended into increased savagery and

30 Telegram to *SS Führungshauptamt, amt für Führer Ausbildung Amt VII*. 7.7.41. (sent from Bad Tölz 2.7.41) signed *Der Kommandeur der Junkerschüle Bad Tölz* 'unknown name' *SS-Standartenführer*. (NARA/BDC)

31 Abschrift: Correspondence from *SS Ustuf*. Laggberg. Klagenfurt 4.10.41 requesting to be releaved/Entlassen. (NARA/BDC)

32 Interrogation of Jakob Yngve Hellenborg. 30.3.43. P3117. (RA)

33 Ibid.

34 Elis Höglund's Lebenslauf. (NARA/BDC)

35 Letter from Elis Höglund to commander of Swedish army. (Author's archive)

36 Interrogation of Ingmar Joelsson, P2557, Gösta Borg. (RA)

Frank Gustavsson swearing the oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler. (Bosse B. archive)

bloodshed as neither side respected the laws of war. This would have dire consequences for both the civilian population and combatants.

In the eyes of the German leaders the war in the east was a European matter and, in early July, the German Envoy **Karl Schnurre** met with Swedish Foreign Minister **Christian Günther** to submit a proposal regarding the latter's nation joining the Axis powers. Unable to ignore Sweden's primarily neutral stance, **Günther** declined, whereupon **Schnurre** tried to gain approval for the establishment of a Swedish volunteer corps. To this **Günther** also demurred. A third proposal allowing Swedish officers to serve on the eastern proved more acceptable.[37] **Günther** forwarded it to Commander in Chief **Thörnell** who also appeared interested in such an exchange. Thus the Swedish Defense Staff sent a classified message to some 40 commissioned officers for comment.[38] This met with opposition from unexpected quarters, one of which was ***Führer* Adolf Hitler**. Thus on 17 July, the Army Staff ruled such designs unfeasible on receipt of official denial by **Schnurre** the previous day. In addition, **Himmler** considered that such an arrangement would be within the ranks of the *SS* as opposed to the *Wehrmacht*. It seems that the search for authorized recruitment on Swedish soil thus ceased, which in itself did not mean that the Swedes wanting to enlist were turned away or that the recruitment of officers set aside. However, some confusion raged at the German Consulate in Stockholm. Cabinet Secretary **Erik Bohman** had on 25 July declared his government's refusal to sanction the formation of a Swedish unit. This declaration, however, in the Consulate's estimation, left the door open as far as the recruitment of individuals was concerned. This resulted in sporadic recruitment until 2 September when Defense Minister **Per-Edvin Sköld**

37 Aktenverkmark. Betr. Besprechung über ausländische Kriegsfreiwillige im Auswärtigen Amt vom 7.7.41. Berlin, 8.7.41. (Author's archive)

38 Westberg/Gyllenhaal, p. 261.

put an end to the matter by announcing that future travel permit applications would only be granted to those seeking service in Finland. All previously submitted applications was rejected as well.[39]

Barbarossa

Nazi Germany commenced its invasion of the the Soviet Union at 05.30 hours on 22 June 1941. Attacking with 110 divisions on a 2000 kilometers broad front, the *Wehrmacht* was supported by Hungary, Slovakia and Finland. Public perceptions in Sweden mixed. The country, despite sanctioning German troop trains across its sovereign territory, remained neutral. Nevertheless, a certain amount of animosity was directed towards the Third Reich for the invasion of Sweden's Scandinavian neighbours, Denmark and Norway. The Soviet Union, nonetheless, was also considered a threat for its invasion of Finland in 1939. For many, Germany appeared to be the lesser of two evils. Indeed, in an internal letter two days after the invasion, *SSS* party leader **Sven-Olof Lindholm,** explained how the organization would respond to the new conflict:

> We want to preserve Sweden's neutrality as far as possible ... I have however no opposition against voluntary participation in the fight against the Soviets. It seems to me, that we can agitate for it, since our perception of the Soviet as the Nordic archenemy has not changed, despite Germany's aggression.[40]

Lindholm was more than likely referring to Finnish volunteers instead of service with the German armed forces. *SS* volunteers on the other hand, were to be exploited for propaganda purposes with the publication of letters from the front in the party's organ. Some of these volunteers subsequently expressed disenchanted with a party they felt had forgotten them, one later remarking that the "*SSS* ignores the Swedish [*SS*-]volunteers".[41]

The German invaders were divided into three Army groups, or *Heeresgruppen* – North (*Nord*), Centre (*Mitte*) and South (*Süd*). *Heeresgruppe* "*Süd*" to which *'Wiking' Division* was attached, attacked from Romania and southern Poland through Ukraine. The goal was to conduct a large pincer move, which would surround some 80 enemy divisions between the border and the Dnieper River thus destroying enemy forces in the Ukraine. It was also essential to capture several key bridges over the aforementioned river. This would allow for a drive towards the Caucasus and the vast natural resources in the area. One of the major obstacles was the so-called "Stalin Line" situated inland.

The *'Wiking' Division* was attached to *Panzergruppe 1* together with *Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler'*; both formations would play a leading role in the offensive. *Panzergruppe 1* was however initially placed as reserve, and did not leave the assembly area until the 25 June when it advanced in the direction towards Zamosc. The plan was for the Soviet border defences tobe broken by other units to clear the way for the rapid advance of motorized units.

'Wiking' Division had a strength of 19,337 soldiers and officers when it swept into the Ukraine and according to a contemporary, at least one Swede was serving in the formation at this time. This was, more than likely, **Hans Lindén** of *SS-Flak-Abt 5* '*Wiking*' or **Frank Gustavsson**. Zamosc having been captured on the morning of the 26th, the Division pressed on towards Rava-Ruska as a preliminary to a drive on Lvov and Tarnopol 150 kilometres inside Soviet territory. Lvov

39 Ibid, p. 262.
40 "Wiking jerk", p. 85.
41 Folke Eriksson and Sveaborg staff correspondence. 21.1.44. Hd. 1209/41. (RA)

was reached by the *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' on 1 July. That same day *Rgt.* '*Nordland*', together with a battery of *SS-Artillerie-Regiment 5* '*Wiking*', fought one of their largest engagements during which 25 enemy tanks were knocked out. In Lvov, the western capital of the Ukraine, the men saw a grim portent of what was to come on discovering large numbers of murdered and mutilated Ukrainians civilians. Blame for these atrocities were quickly laid on Russian civilians and the local Jews, which escalated into racially motivated hate and murder. *'Wiking' Division's* battle exploits would be accompanied by war crimes on a large scale. For example, it acted in accordance to the notorious "Commissar Order". The Division also took part in the "final solution" against the local Jewish population. One such incident occurred on 2 July. On that day news reached *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' that Regimental commander ***SS-Standartenführer*** **Hilmar Wäckerle** had been killed in action. This loss effected the men deeply and *5.* and *7./Rgt.* sought vengeance on the village where he fell.[42] This act of vengeance, according to some sources, cost the lives of 150 Jews. Elements of the Division also supported Ukrainian militia units in murderous large-scale pogroms in Zolochiv during early July.

Rgt. '*Germania*' and *Rgt.* '*Nordland*' passed *Rgt.* '*Westland*' on 2 July. The Regiment followed towards Tarnopol on the morning of the 4th, reaching the town at 1200 hours and Borki at 1700 hours.[43] From Tarnopol, the division turned to the south-east and during the following weeks several more towns, including Satanov and Husiatyn on 6 July, were captured. Husiatyn was important to the retreating Red Army and thus *Rgt.* '*Westland*' was under heavy attack by the the enemy. Meantime, *Rgt.* '*Germania*' and *Rgt.* '*Nordland*' pursued the retreating enemy to the north-east. Despite rainy weather that made the advance difficult; more towns, including Berdichen and Shitomir fell to the invader. It was during this time that *Panzergruppe 1* and *6. Armee* broke through the Stalin Line, after which the Soviets retired towards Dnieper commenced on a broad front.

The recruitment problems that had dogged the *'Wiking' Division* prior to the invasion ceased as European volunteers, including several Swedes such as **Gösta Borg,** flocked to join the crusade against communism. His illegal journey from Sweden to Norway with **Ragnar Linnér** and **Bengt Rosmark** began the day Operation Barbarossa started.[44]

Bengt Rosmark (b.1915) had been a member of the Royal Swedish Navy. Finding his first employment at 14, he left it after a single year to join *Skeppsgossekåren*, the navy youth organisation. After two and a half years he was old enough to join the service. A former member of the *NSAP,* he subsequently joined the Swedish *SA*, where he spoke at several National Socialist meetings during the 1930s. Disillusionment and resignation followed in 1938 when the party abandoned the swastika; **Borg** and **Linnér** left the party for the same reason. Thus the former became involved in a number of extremist organisations. **Rosmark's** involvement with **Ernst Renhammar**, who would be sentenced to hard labour for creating a clandestine organisation engaged in high treason, **Rosmark** was forced to resign his submarine assignment. **Renhammar** had discussed the possibility of recruiting Swedes for the *Waffen-SS* as early as October 1940. **Rosmark** expressed an interest in joining the German armed forces at the same time. This is why he applied for a passport application which was subsequently denied. This is not too surprising since he was considered to be both dangerous and "to be more of German than Swedish minded" by the police authorities. Posting a letter to his former commander from occupied Norway, he stated his place was at the front, but promised to make contact as soon as he was home again.[45]

42 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)
43 Ibid.
44 Interrogation of Gösta Borg, 12.5.45. P2557. (RA)
45 Bengt Rosmark to 2 M.K commander. 22.6.41. P2204. (RA)

The trio's intent to join the *Waffen-SS* appears uncertain. After the war, **Borg** claimed that they had originally planned to enlist in the Finnish Army but, as a large number of Swedish units were gathering in northern Sweden, it was easier to avoid detection when attempting to cross the frontier. In another document from his 1941 Swedish police folder he claimed that he and **Linnér** went to Norway after learning of a National Socialist education institution in Germany where they hoped to learn the language before assignment to a *Wehrmacht* unit on the Eastern Front. **Rosmark** claimed that he hoped to join the *Kriegsmarine*, something which his recruitment officers told him was impossible.[46] Nonetheless, the trio signed their *SS*-enlistment papers in Oslo prior to being stationed at a school whilst waiting for transport to the Reich. There they would encounter several other Swedish and Norwegian volunteers.[47]

Another trio that met by coincidence during those fateful summer days was **Georg Roos, Kurt Lundin** and **Erik Dahlin** all of whom lived in the town of Borås. They had previously served in the Winter War and decided to join the *SS* on 24 June 1941.[48] **Dahlin** (b.1918) had grown up poor and was the oldest of three sons. Considered a bastard child, his parents were unmarried at the time of his birth. The family situation became even worse following his father's death in 1927. His mother was left with a hard task, especially with **Erik** who found it difficult to assimilate into society. In 1933 he joined the *Skeppsgossekåren*, the navy youth organization, where he became acquainted with **Kurt Lundin**. **Erik** had a hard time fitting in and fled. Forcibly returned to the ship, he was finally discharged in 1935. Returning to his home in Borås, **Erik** drifted into criminality only to be sentenced for petty infractions.[49]

Lundin, who had been a member of different National Socialist parties during the period 1932-1934, held a valid passport and could cross the border legally. His two companions crossed the border illegally by foot. The trio were, following the enlistment, stationed at the same school as **Borg, Linnér** and **Rosmark.** They would be joined by **Ingmar Joelsson, Lars Forssberg, Lars-Owe Cassmer** and **Heino Meyer.** The latter – just 17 years old – left school to enlist in the *SS* on 3 July.[50] A Swedish national with German origins, nothing prevented him from serving in the German armed forces. He also had several relatives who serving on the German side during the war. Indeed, his cousin, according to family lore, was killed in action as a *Luftwaffe* officer during the D-Day landings.[51]

Cassmer legally visited Norway during a period of leave at the beginning of July 1941. He joined the *SS* at this time. Why he enlisted remains unclear. He initially claimed it was due to the fact that he had felt there were some military deficiencies within the Swedish Army and, as a former volunteer in Finland; he wanted to experience service with the German Army. He was also engaged to **Gretchen Himmler**, a supposed German national who was a distant relative of **Heinrich Himmler**. Service in the *Wehrmacht,* he felt, was a necessary prelude to the union. Swedish authorities, on investigating this tale, discovered that no woman by that name ever visited Sweden during said period. **Cassmer**, on being questioned again, changed his story, this time claiming that he had been engaged to a woman who had *presented* herself as **Gretchen Himmler**. She urged him to travel to Norway in July 1941 in order to meet up. Upon arrival, she could not

46 Protocol from investigation mentioned below, 8 September 1943. Interrogation of Bengt Rosmark. P2204. (RA)

47 Interrogation of Gösta Borg, 12.5.45. P2557. (RA)

48 Interrogation of Kurt Lundin, 29.7.43. P3895. (RA)

49 Ivarsson, p.1 ff.

50 *SS*-Stammkarte, Heino Meyer. In service within the *SS* from 3.7.41. (NARA/BDC) and letter from Heino Meyers brother, 19.1.97. (Bosse B. Archive)

51 Correspondence from Heino Meyer's brother, 19.11.96. (Bosse B. Archive)

A post-war picture which could just as well have been taken in Norway in 1941. Top row from left: Gösta Borg, Bengt Rosmark and Ragnar Linnér. To the far right, lower row: Heino Meyer. (Author's archive)

be found anywhere, and he realized he had been duped. He thereupon enlisted in the *SS* to avoid becoming a laughingstock.[52] Even if he denied having been a National Socialist, a Swedish Army comrade subsequently stated they often discussed politics, and that **Cassmer** held a firm National Socialist stance claiming to have been a member of a "Nazi youth movement".[53]

Lars Forssberg (b.1915) was a convinced National Socialist who had worked as a teaching assistant. Having joined what would eventually become the *SSS* in 1934, he had been a section leader in the Stockholm department of the party student organization and had also participated in the Finnish Winter War, seeing action with the *Swedish Volunteer Corps*.[54] Contemporaneous with **Gösta Borg**, he expressed interest in joining *SS Standarte* '*Nordland*' in early 1941.

Following a successful appeal on 13 July 1941, the Swedes left for Germany. They reached Hamburg after a three-day journey after which they were split up, **Borg, Linnér, Forssberg, Lundin** and **Cassmer** was sent to a training camp in Breslau while the others continued to Sennheim in occupied France.[55] **Borg, Linnér** and **Rosmark** wished to reach the front as soon as possible. This was why the first two was sent to Breslau. **Rosmark** was denied this because he had not served in the Winter War.[56] **Cassmer** also wished to be sent to the front without having to undergo political indoctrination. Thus, he was sent to Breslau, where the training consisted of

52 Interrogation of Lars-Owe Andersson Cassmer 23-27 August 1943. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
53 Till H.d. 4265/41. 23.5.57. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
54 *Den svenske folksocialisten*, 9.5.42. (KB)
55 Interrogation of Gösta Borg. 12.5.45. P2557. (RA)
56 Protocol from investigation mentioned below 8 September 1943. Interrogation of Bengt Rosmark. P2204. (RA)

The group of Swedes at the Breslau camp, including Gösta Borg, Ragnar Linnér, Kurt Lundin, Frans Wahlberg and Lars Forssberg. (Bosse B. archive)

military exercises only. Thus, after five weeks' training, he was not obligated to swear an oath of allegiance to **Hitler**.[57] **Cassmer**, in order for to avoid punishment for his desertion, applied for military discharge from the Swedish army at the end of July. This was denied because of failure to return equipment.[58]

Ingmar Joelsson departed from Norway with the others but, as a commissioned Swedish officer, left the group in Hamburg for Berlin. Following what was in reality a mere formality, he rejoined the others at Sennheim.[59]

2nd Lieutenant Carl-Olof Wrang deserted from his unit three days after **Meyer** had joined the *SS* in order to cross the Norwegian frontier. His intention, however, was not *SS* service. In 1939, he applied to join the French Army, as he felt war between France and Germany was imminent. Foreign service being limited to the celebrated Foreign Legion, he remained in Sweden after which he fought in the Winter War as a platoon leader. One member of his platoon was none other than **Gösta Borg**. Returning to Sweden in April 1940, he re-entered the Swedish Army for fear that his country would share the fate of Norway and Denmark. The invasion not materialising, he applied to join British forces fighting the Italians in Greece. He was, much to his consternation, denied a travel permit. The reason for his subsequent desertion was he hoped to find his way to Finland via Norway. The only way to do this was to enlist in the *SS*. To this he readily agreed. Flown via Copenhagen to Berlin, he was persuaded to remain in *SS* service despite a complete lack of interest. On discovering a Finnish volunteer battalion was being raised, he applied for an immediate transfer to the unit's base at Stralsund training camp, which was granted.

57 Interrogation of Lars-Owe Andersson Cassmer 23 and 27 August 1943. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
58 Case compilation Hd. 4265/41. 20.10.44. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
59 Interrogation of Ingmar Joelsson. 30.8.43, P2557, Gösta Borg. (RA)

Promoted to *Obersturmführer* on arrival, his application for transfer to Finland was granted following the discovery that the volunteers would be deployed in the Ukraine. **Wrang** subsequently joined the Swedish volunteers on the Hanko Front. One who opposed his discharge was *SS* recruitment manager **Gottlob Berger**, who felt the decision should be challenged as **Wrang** could be useful for "future work" in Sweden centering on recruitment.[60] Returning home following his service, he rejoined the Army and became commander of the Swedish airborne school in Karlsborg and commander of a UN battalion in Congo during the 1960s. He retired as a Lieutenant-Colonel in 1977.

The majority of Swedish volunteers spent the opening stages of *Barbarossa* at various training camps. **Elis Höglund** and **Erik Dahlin** left Norway for Sennheim arriving at the latter on 15 July. By that time, **Georg Roos**, who joined the *SS* with **Dahlin**, had already been discharged as unfit for duty. In reality, both **Höglund** and **Dahlin** did not meet *SS* recruit requirements. Recruits at this early stage of the war, had to have clean criminal records and be "Germanic" in appearance. **Dahlin** spent his youth as a petty thief and **Höglund**'s eyes were too close together and his stature below standard.

The Sennheim volunteers underwent no military training. Their schedule consisted of marching, singing, politics and sport. Dispatched to a camp in Graz after one month, they remained there for a few days only before proceeding to Stralsund camp. Unattached to *'Wiking' Division* at this time, they were assigned to *SS Infanterie-Erzats Batalion* '*Der Führer*' which later became a component of *2. SS-Panzer Division Das Reich*. **Hellenborg** was with this unit at the time of his requested resignation, He was dispatched to Graz before it was approved. Whilst there he befriended the convalescing **Fred Nilsson** whose hopes for a commission were dashed at least for the time being.[61]

Back at the front, *'Wiking' Division* had been deployed to spearhead the advance on 16 July. It soon became involved in heavy fighting with Soviet armored units and infantry. For example, *Rgt.* '*Germania*' came under heavy attack at Taratscha before the enemy withdrew. *'Wiking'* was transferred from *XIV. Armee Korps* to the *III. Armee Korps* on 30 July.[62] The Division captured some 6,000 prisoners of war during the first 27 days of the invasion. Throughout August, the enemy was retreating with the Division in close pursuit.[63] The town of Tschigrin fell on 7 August after which the Division cleared the area between the town and the Dnieper of enemy stragglers. That same day fierce fighting continued on the Division's northern flank at Korsun. The battles around Kiev having ended, the invaders annihilated a large enemy force at Uman which held out until the 8 August. As a result, the Soviet 6th, 12th and 18th Armies were destroyed, *Panzergruppe 1* and *17. Armee* having taken some 100,000 prisoners of war.

A bridgehead over the Dnieper, where *'Wiking' and Panzergruppe 1* was to cross between Saporosje and Kremenchug, was the next objective. The next objective for *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' was to force a crossing of the Ros on 9 August. In pursuit of the retreating enemy, its first elements traversed the river obstacle at 1800 hours, taking up defensive position and sending out reconnaissance squads. Over the following days, the enemy continued to retreat while *Rgt.* '*Westland*' expanded the established bridgehead.[64] These actions stabilized the situation between Boguslav and Korsun and finally, the reinforced regiment, now known as "*Gefechtsgruppe* '*Westland*'" moved 10 km south from Swenigorodka towards Talnoje. By 16 August, the northern flank was secured.

60 T-175/R-110/2634465 and T-175/R-110/2634466. (NARA)
61 Interrogation of Fred Ingvar Nilsson, 7.6.43. P3742. (RA)
62 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.

The volunteers' in Breslau, anxious to join in the campaign continued their accelerated infantry training during the first weeks of the campaign. **Ragnar Linnér** and **Gösta Borg** joined '*Westland*' on 14 August. **Lars Forssberg** joined them later that same month.[65] **Lundin** was placed as a "*Kradschütze*" within the *15./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. **Cassmer** left a questionable testimony about his service. He claimed 14 days' initial service with an *Artillerie-Regiment* during the invasion of Crete. He was, he also claimed, next sent to the Eastern Front to serve in *Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler*', but later transferred to *Totenkopf Division*.[66] However, available documentation makes clear that he actually served with *SS Artillerie-Rgt. 5 'Wiking'*.[67]

Frans Wahlberg, who left Sweden in April 1941, joined the *SS* in July that same year. Participating in a three-week course at Breslau camp, he was dispatched to '*Westland*' as a medic.[68] **Wahlberg's** testimony, however, remains contentious. Subsequent serving with *'Nordland' Division* in 1945, he was captured outside of Berlin. Interrogated by Swedish authorities following release from a Soviet prisoner of war camp in 1946, related details of his service appear confused. For example, he claimed immediate promotion to *SS-Unterscharführer* despite the fact that early letters of which he was the recipient are addressed to *SS-Rottenführer Frans Wahlberg*. He was also shown sporting the same rank in a photo.[69] It does however seem likely that he only participated in the three-week training, as he already been a volunteer in three different wars. He did not, as a previously convicted felon, meet the *SS* qualifications.[70]

The "*Hamilton Group*" and "*Eklöf Group*" – New Swedish Recruits, August 1941

The early volunteers joined, as seen in most cases, individually or in small groups by legally or illegally crossing the Norwegian border. Unlike them, during August two groups of volunteers legally joined the *SS* in Finland. The largest of these groups, the so-called "Hamilton Group" consisted of ten Swedes who crossed the border on the 9 August, after which they underwent transport to Tornio.[71] The group received its unofficial name because its only German-speaking member was a Count and officer candidate named **Ulph Hamilton** (b. 1921) who acted as interpreter.[72] The group's other member were as follows:

Tor Samuelsson (b. 1921) from Gothenburg. He had served in the Winter War without seeing combat, after which he was employed by a regiment in his home town.

Arne Ericsson (b. 1913), a chauffeur by trade who served as a volunteer during the Winter War. He would be charged with fraudulent behavior, a milder grade of fraud for absconding with travel expense money provided by the Finnish Volunteer Agency.[73] He later claimed during interrogation to have been motivated by a wish to serve in Finland, and had no political

65 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 9.5.42. (KB)
66 Newspaper article with the testimony of Cassmer. 9.6.43. Hd. 4265/41 (RA). A subsequent letter addressed to *Kanonier*, the lowest rank within an artillery unit, points to Cassmer serving in an artillery regiment. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
67 Deutsche Diensstelle list (WASt), Berlin, 8.5.79. (Author's archive)
68 Case compilation Hd. 3660/40. P4820. (RA)
69 Letter to Frans Wahlberg, 28.2.42. P4820. (RA)
70 Case compilation Hd. 3660/40. P4820. (RA)
71 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
72 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
73 Anmälan från Nils Palme, chef för frivilligbyrån för Finland ang. Arne Eriksson till kriminalpolisen, Stockholm. 8.8.41. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)

Frans Wahlberg: a veteran of many wars. (Lennart Westberg)

Ulph Hamilton. (Author's archive)

interest.[74]

Åke Söderberg (b. 1923) in Stockholm.

Åke Forsell, (b. 1915) served in the Winter War and almost lost his eyesight following a skiing accident.[75]

Ragnar Johansson (I), (b. 1908) from Eskilstuna where he had worked as a machinist; his military service was marred by repeated absences; a convicted felon, he had been incarcerated for theft.[76] A Winter War volunteer, he never participated in combat.[77] He later claimed to have no interest in politics. He was, in order to differentiate him from a younger comrade with the same name, commonly known to *SS* comrades as **Johansson I** (*the first,* or *the older).*

Karl-Erik "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** (b. 1923). Nicknamed *Bålsta* based on the town outside Stockholm from where he descended.

Gerhard Stolpen, (b. 1922) worked as a conductor in Sweden, and is the only National Socialist member of the group. Although non-party member, he was considered a fervent supporter who purchased individual issues of the party magazine.[78] Moreover, he was considered generally unreliable and easily led as long as it involved adventure.[79]

Sten "**Stesse**" **Olsson** (b. 1921) hailed from Sundbyberg and worked as a newspaper salesman. A veteran of the Winter War, he did not complete his Swedish military service. A convicted felon, he was jailed for burglary, in 1937.[80] He expressed the wish, according to his mother, to return to Finland in 1941 to "cap Russians" and thus requested permission from the Swedish Army to serve there. By the time it was denied in September, he had, already signed his *SS* service contract.[81] He subsequently claimed, in a letter written whilst at training camp, to have left home to fight on Finland's behalf and not for Germany.[82]

The group organized despite Sweden's official no recruitment policy, largely the result of the Director **Oscar Nordenstein**, who was a "national organization director" of **Birger Furugårds**' "Swedish National Socialist Party" and had also formed the anti-Semitic organization "Conservation of Swedishness in Sweden" in 1940. He made his own attempt to organize volunteers for a Swedish brigade in the German Army, and invited "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** to dinner during summer 1941 with the sole purpose of recruiting for his proposed brigade. No doubt influenced by a love for adventure, "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** signed an enlistment contract, which in reality was not legally binding. As a reward, he was given a bounty of 50 Swedish crowns. Adventurism and a willingness to fight communism – as opposed to National Socialist fervor – appears to have been the primary motivation of this group. **Ragnar Johansson I** subsequently related how he had been recruited together with the majority of the group: Returning to Sweden after serving in the Finnish Winter War, he was unable to find civilian employment. Faced with simultaneous divorce

74 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
75 Information from Åke Forsell's grandchild to the author. 11.6.06. (Author's archive)
76 Case compilation XII83/Ä 632. (RA)
77 P.M. concerning metal worker Nils Ragnar Johansson. (RA)
78 P.M. concerning Olof Gerhard Stolpen-Johansson. 9.6.45 XII83/Ä 3381. (RA)
79 P.M. to case XII83/Ä 3381. 21.4.44. (RA)
80 Police file of Sten Olsson, 7.8.43. P3959. (RA)
81 P.M. with information provided by Sten Gustaf Olsson's mother, Alfhild Tyra Albertina Andersson. 12.9.41. P3959. (RA)
82 Letter from Sten Olsson 19.1.42. P3959. (RA)

The Hamilton group poses on the boat from Finland to Germany. (Author's archive)

proceedings, he considered re-joining the volunteers in Finland. It was whilst visiting the Finnish volunteer agency in Stockholm that he encountered the future members of the *Hamilton group*. That evening, while staying at a small hotel, they were visited by a hitherto unknown director who suggested that they travel to Finland with him, as he knew an easier way. Open to this proposal, they chose to accept the proposal. They were, after crossing the frontier, met by German officer who arranged their transport to Tornio; there they signed their service contracts. **Johansson** did not realize he had enlisted in the *Waffen-SS* until his arrival in Germany.[83]

The Finnish frontier was crossed legally on 9 August; the group appear to have enlisted en masse the following day.[84] They departed with the belief that they would join a Finnish unit equipped by the *Wehrmacht*. Their hasty choice was later explained by **Tor Samuelsson**:

> We did not know what the *SS* was, but it didn't make any difference to us what unit we would fight so long as it was put into our contracts that we would fight Russians.[85]

This fact would affect the group and several of the members would never reach the front or were sent home shortly thereafter. Former farmer **Nils Sture Johansson** (b. 1917) also joined the group.[86] Resuming his military service after his return in 1940, he requested a discharge to fight once more for Finland in July 1941. Exactly what occurred afterwards remains uncertain; he subsequently discovered, he later claimed, that mostly infantrymen were dispatched to Finland,

83 P.M. concerning metal worker Nils Ragnar Johansson. 27.2.47. XII 83/Ä 632. (RA)
84 Arne Eriksson passport. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
85 Interview with Tor Samuelsson by Martin Månsson. 30.10.00.
86 Case compilation H.A.459/46, 1.8.46. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)

and that his chances of fight as a volunteer were slim. Similar claims were made by **Arne Ericsson**, who had served as an anti-aircraft artilleryman in Sweden and Finland in 1939-40.[87] **Johansson**, nevertheless, met up with the *Hamilton Group* by chance, joined them on their trip to Finland and later claimed he had not been in contact with **Nordenstein** prior to this**.**[88] The veracity of this tale remains questionable inasmuch as, related in a bugged telephone conversation transcript, he spoke with **Nordenstein** on 8 August in regard to departure details.[89] The police also suspected he never intended to serve in Finland at all; this was written in his discharge application. In the conversation between **Johansson** and **Nordenstein**, the former was informed his travel expenses would be compensated by the German Consulate. This points to awareness of what country he would actually be fighting for.[90]

The *Hamilton Group* traveled to Germany by boat. Sent to Stralsund camp at the beginning of September, they joined *3./SS-Infanterie-Ersatz-Batallion 'Der Führer'*. While there, another Swedish national joined the group. **Arvid Johansson** enlisted in Copenhagen with the hope to fight for Finland. A tailor by trade, he worked in Denmark, Belgium and France during the 1930's, but failed to find lasting employment. Immigrating to Germany in 1941, he wanted, following the start of *Barbarossa*, to return to Sweden and take up the Finnish cause. But, having heard rumors that no Swedish volunteer unit would be raised, he attempted to join a Danish volunteer unit and ended up on a train that took him to Sennheim. On the understanding he had agreed to German service, he applied for discharge. His Company commander responded by ripping the letter into pieces. Thus Johansson remained with the *SS*, Dispatched to Stralsund at the beginning of September, he commenced weapons training.[91]

The *Hamilton Group* volunteers were unaware that they had signed-up for *Waffen-SS* service, something which came as a shock to their relatives. "**Stesse**" **Olsson's** mother had been notified by **Nordenstein** following her son's departure, who claimed that he himself had been too old to serve and thus had been sent home while "**Stesse**" **Olsson** had been accepted for service. Some days later, the mother of **Åke Söderberg** telephoned and related the news – their sons were in Germany, something which she had read about in the newspapers. The worried mothers attempted to contact **Nordenstein**, but his phone was disconnected and, on visiting his home, was nowhere to be found. Neither could the Finnish or German consulates offer any help, although the latter promised to investigate the matter and get back to them. As a last desperate act, **Olsson's** mother appealed to the Swedish authorities asking for help in getting her son – his discharge having been denied – home. They would have no success, but would eventually meet their sons again.[92] Other parents seem to have responded with less concern: "My parents and relatives were naturally quite worried, but not more than if I had been in Finland".[93]

Samulesson explained, the linguistic difficulties within the group were soon overcome:

> At first we spoke Swedish in the group, but further on this got mixed with some German. I also learned to speak Norwegian as I served with several Norwegian volunteers.[94]

87 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
88 Interrogation of Nils Sture Johansson, 2.4.44. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
89 Bugged telephone conversation between Nordenstein and Nils Sture Johansson, 8.8.41. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
90 P.M. ang. Ärende XII 83 Ä 2312. 15.1.43. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
91 Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)
92 P.M. with information from Sten Gustaf Olsson's mother, Alfhild Tyra Albertina Andersson. 12.9.41. P3959. (RA)
93 Letter from Tor Samuelsson to the author, 29.9.05. (Author's archive)
94 Ibid.

The second group has been designated "*Eklöf group*" was the opposite. This group, according to a border control document, crossed the frontier near Haparanda on 26 August 1941.[95] Its composition was as follows:

Gunnar Eklöf, organized National Socialist born in 1922. He would eventually succeed in making himself unpopular with several of the Swedish volunteers while serving as an officer and platoon leader on the Eastern Front in 1944.

Sven Rydén, National Socialist born in 1897. Swedish home guard lieutenant convicted of drunkenness in the service but slipped from his sentence by escaping to Finland and joining the *SS*. His high age resulted in that he never served at the front, but still received the rank of *SS-Obersturmführer*. He was murdered at the end of the war and his murderer is often claimed to have been none other than **Gunnar Eklöf.** For more information about him, please see the chapter about Swedish non-combatants in the *SS*.

Folke Nystrand, born in 1922. Organized National Socialist who had been admitted to mental institution prior to the war.[96] After the war he became a successful cartoonist and father of the cartoon character "Roland Enraged".

Lennart Thelander, born in 1912. He was a member of the German *Sturmabteilung (SA)* who probably never served with the *SS*.

Bengt Olsson (b.1910) Younger brother of **Karl Helmstrand.** He would later serve with the *'Wiking' Division*.

Karl Åke Arnold Engström (b. 1915).

Göran Svinhufvud (b.1919).

Gunnar Eklöf later claimed that he met the others in Tornio, whilst his friend **Folke Nystrand** later related he had been contacted by **Karl Helmstrand**, who wanted to know how he felt about German service. **Nystrand** was interested, and together with other volunteers, left for Finland on 20 August.[97] **Helmstrand** and **Nordenstein** had actually been in contact and discussed the possibility to recruiting volunteers for a Swedish unit that would fight in Finland.[98] Some success appears to have resulted in the subsequent recruitment – thus the *Eklöf-Group* consisted of a number of National Socialists.

There is little doubt that this group joined the *SS* for ideological reasons. **Gunnar Eklöf** visited the German Consulate in Stockholm following his high school graduation in spring 1941 in order to investigate the possibility of joining the *SS*. There he had no success, and instead he wrote a letter to the *SS* authorities in Norway, with the same result. They instead proposed that he would travel to Germany and try his luck there.[99] Instead he returned to his childhood home in Malmberget, northern Sweden, before he decided to cross the border into Finland. Previously he had attempted to enlist as a volunteer for Finland, but was rejected for lack of military training. The group was shipped from Turku to Stettin from where they were sent to various *SS* training camps.

Neither of the organizers were prosecuted. The reason for this was quite simple: it was considered they had acted in an advisory role and that no recruitment or signing of service-contracts had taken place on home territory. **Karl Helmstrand** joined the group a month after arrival.[100] Little

95 Document to the Swedish Foreign Ministry from Happaranda border control. 28.8.41. (Author's archive)
96 P.M. with information provided by Folke Nystrand's father to the Swedish police. July 1943. P3432. (RA)
97 Interrogation of Folke Nystrand, 31.10.42. P3432. (RA)
98 Document concerning recruitment of Swedish volunteers for the *Waffen-SS*. 15.9.41. P2520. (RA)
99 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf. 28.2.42. P3592. (RA)
100 P.M. to P 2520. 3.11.43. (RA)

is however known about his subsequent *SS* service. Training with *5./SS-Inf.Ers-Bat* '*Westland*' he was dispatched to *'Wiking' Division* in early 1942. Serving with *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*' in March 1943, he was transferred to an *NCO*-training course at Grafenwöhr. Promotion to the rank of *SS Unterscharführer* followed; but he returned home shortly afterwards.[101]

Fall and winter 1941: At the Front and Training

Meanwhile, while most Swedes participated in training, **Lindén** experienced combat with an anti-aircraft crew of *1./SS-Flak-Abt 5* '*Wiking*' and his friend **Nilsson** recovered in hospital. From there he wrote to their friend **Erik Wallin**, who intended to travel as a volunteer in the *SFB – Swedish volunteer Battalion* deployed on the Hanko Front in Finland. **Nilsson**, obviously envious, replied that his greatest wish was to meet the hated "Reds" in battle again. He remained at the convalescent home for three weeks before participating in accelerated infantry training because "It is my only chance to come along to Moscow", adding "We [Wallin and Nilsson] must try to keep in touch with each other until we meet in Moscow".[102] In another undated letter, the young Swede contemplated the possibility of death in combat:

> Jerka [Erik Wallin's nickname], if I or Hasse [Hans Lindén's nickname] would be killed, then you can be sure we, like you and Affe, would do so without fear because a greater and nobler thing we cannot give our lives to than the struggle to liberate Europe from the red devils These are not big words, you understand, as we, who have gone to battle against the Bolsheviks, can feel proud for we belong to the core of the Swedish people."

Nilsson was sent in fall 1941 to *5./Rgt.* '*Nordland*' as a MG-gunner.[103]

The Swedish volunteers, including **Lars-Owe Cassmer, Lars Forssberg**, **Frans Wahlberg**, **Kurt Allan Lundin, Ragnar Linnér** and **Gösta Borg,** who had been in training at Breslau camp reached the front in the middle of August 1941. **Borg** and **Linnér** reached Regiment '*Westland*' in the whilst the Regiment was involved in the August battles around Dnjepropetrowsk, a industrial town by the river Dnepr where *'Wiking' Division* had been deployed on 20 August.

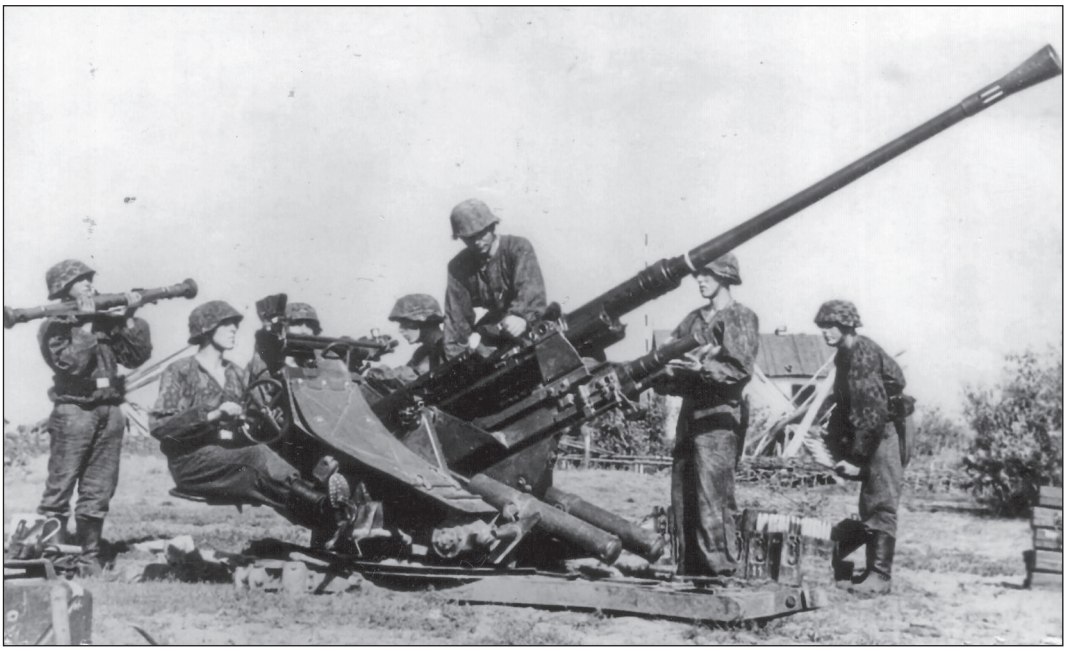
The first units of *Panzergruppe 1* established a bridgehead across the Dnieper on 31 August. The first regiment to cross was '*Nordland*', which occupied defensive positions on 2 September. Heavy Soviet counter-attacks followed. In addition, the defenders were under sustained artillery fire, suffering 20 killed and 60 wounded on 3 September alone. The remainder of *'Wiking'* remained in defensive positions until 7 September when they crossed the river under heavy bombardment As a result of the furious enemy fire the heavy weapons had to remain in Dnepropetrowsk, but German forces still managed to hold their ground. It was vital the bridgehead be expanded in order to continue the advance. **Ragnar Linnér** recalled the briefing of their company commander:

> The Division's 3rd Regiment has attacked in an attempt to expand the bridgehead, but the assault has been driven back with our biggest losses so far, 400 dead and wounded. The Russians have a huge artillery superiority. Tomorrow, our Regiment will attack with the same

101 Interrogation of Folke Nystrand, 31.10.42. P3432. (RA) and Erkennungsmarkenverändungsschein, 1.3.43. (Author's archive)

102 Letter from Fred Nilsson to Erik Wallin. 5.8.41. (Author's archive)

103 Interrogation of Karl Fred Ingvar Nilsson, 28.5.43. P3742 (RA) and several documents from the *SS* confirm service with *5./SS-Infanterie-Rgt.* '*Nordland*'. (Author's archive)



The anti-aircraft gun on which Lindén served as crew member.

Fred Nilsson (right) poses with Tor Samuelsson following *SS* enlistment. (Månsson-Westberg archive)

> task, and our Battalion goes first. I have, by permission of Battalion commander, managed to obtain the honour for a company to go first. It will be a glorious task.

Following the speech of the company commander, the platoon commanders gave further orders – "Bring as much ammunition and food as you can, and at least eight hand grenades per man. Keep tight in the attack. The afternoon can be used to write letters."[104]

They crossed to the bridgehead without loss that evening. The attack pressed on to two large villages and, after a six-hour firefight, had captured six kilometers of ground – thus their mission was complete and defensive positions were established as other formations advanced. Enemy artillery and snipers caused numerous losses; the lice that infested the captured trenches caused further torment.[105]The Division planned to resume its offensive at 07.00 hours the following day; this was delayed until 15.00 hours. The objective was Kamenka and its surrounding heights; the enemy did everything to throw them back. The outskirts of the town were reached the same day after fierce fighting. *Rgt.* '*Germania*' having fallen behind due to heavy enemy resistance, *II./Rgt.'Westland*' was forced to deploy into a hedgehog defense. Despite this, the attack was successful. With only minor losses, *Rgt.* '*Westland*' and *Rgt.* '*Germania*' had taken 5,000 prisoners and large quantities of war material. Soviet batteries bombarded the invaders throughout the night. The following days were spent improving positions and repelling enemy counterattacks. It was clear to that Soviet morale was on the wane. Indeed, the *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' war diary entry for 12 September recorded the intake of numerous demoralized prisoners.[106] **Ragnar Linnér** subsequently observed: "Deserters flowed from the enemy side on a daily basis, one day, a whole enemy Company left their positions after shooting their commissars; the record was 240 deserters in a single day".[107]

Cassmer claimed initial service as a squad leader in a light field artillery battery. He lost touch with this unit during the Dnepropetrowsk fighting and was transferred to a *Sturmgeschütze* battery, where he would remain for the remainder of his *SS* service.[108]

Panzergruppe 1 linked up with **Heinz Guderians** *Panzergruppe 2* approximately 150 kilometres from Kiev on 14 September. The city fell after four days fighting. Meanwhile, *Panzergruppe 1* was given the task of seizing the industrial region extending from Donetsk to the Black sea. This also included the city of Rostov situated by the river Don.

For the Swedes in Stralsund the training continued and, as opposed to the education at Sennheim, they focused on weapons instructions including machine-guns and mortars. Several also swore an oath of allegiance to **Adolf Hitler** on 27 September. **Samuelsson,** however**,** refused and was tasked with scrubbing the barracks as punishment.[109] The reason for this refusal was a combination of patriotism and absence of National Socialist ardor; **Åke Forsell** also claimed to have refused. By keeping silent during recitation, but was caught by an officer who threatened to convene a firing squad. On the second attempt, he made some mouth movements but remained silent.[110] This tale differs from what **Arvid Johansson's** claim that the oath was voluntary and every Swede abstained except for **Erik Dahlin**.[111]

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104 "Experiences from the Russo-German War". R. Linnér. *Svea Gardesbladet* 1942. (KB)
105 Ibid.
106 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)
107 'Experiences from the Russo-German War'. R. Linnér. *Svea Gardesbladet* 1942. (KB)
108 Letter to Kapten S. Hamilton from Löjtnant Bo Sandmark. Stockholm, 6.2.42. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)
109 Ivarsson, p.125.
110 Information provided by Åke Forsell's grandson. 11.6.06. (Author's archive)
111 Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)

Ukraine 1941: strain and fatigue are clearly discernable on the faces of Gösta Borg (left) and Ragnar Linnér (right). (Göran Hargestam)

The training at Stralsund was rigourous. **Samuelsson** observed:

> If it was any of us that thought he would come to paradise, he has been cruelly deceived. We were awakened at six without coffee and were doled out bread dry during the trip; then we had to work, moving large cabinets, clean and so on.[112]

Elis Höglund noted discipline was strict, the soldiers were rarely off duty and constantly went hungry. They stole bread to supplement rations and **Dahlin,** on one occasion, managed to steal an entire loaf of bread. Concerning the training, **Höglund** remembered "The Unterscharführer forced us to run with gas masks until we passed out. Small discipline errors led to squats with the rifle on straight arms, or push-ups."[113] In total, 16 Swedish volunteers were at Stralsund prior to entraining for Klagenfurt camp at the end September.[114] At the same time, eight Swedes were or had been serving at the front.[115]

112 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

113 Ivarsson, p. 125.

114 For example, Elis Höglunds *Wehrpass – 29/9 Ersatz-Bat.* '*Westland*'. (Author's archive) and Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)

115 Aufstellung über Verluste und Aufzeichnungen der germanischen Freiwilligen (19.9.1941). (NARA)

The Hamilton group poses for another photo shortly after arriving at training camp. The uniforms are of the standard drill pattern. (Author's archive)

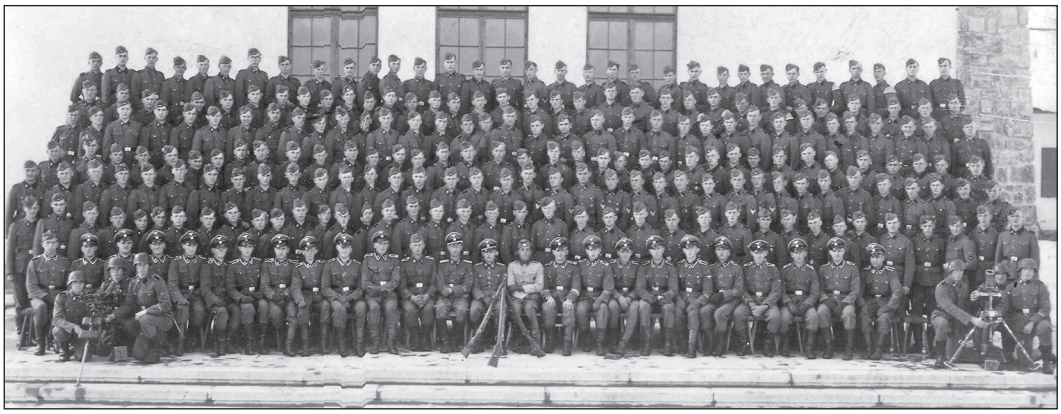
On the 28 September the *'Wiking' Division* stormed out of the bridgehead. The enemy was once again routed. Podgrodje was reached at 1600 hours. The enemy continued their retreat until 3 October, when they took up positions on the heights northwest Nikolajef.[116] Fighting there lasted until the Soviet retirement on 7 October. *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' followed in close pursuit.[117]

Frank Gustavsson, who more than likely served with the Division since the start of *Operation Barbarossa,* fell ill of rheumatism. Recovery and a period of leave followed, after which he was posted to a replacement unit in Holland.[118]

Transfer from *SS-Inf.Ers.Bat "Der Führer" to 'Westland'*

The Swedes were organized into *SS-Inf.Ers.Btl.* '*Westland*' at Klagenfurt and were thus transferred to *'Wiking' Division*. Some also held permanent positions within the camp. **SS Schütze Olof Sandström** served there from September 1941.[119] A convinced National Socialist since the 1930's, he fought with the *Swedish Volunteer Corps* during the Winter War.[120] As he had trouble finding an employment in Sweden after his return, he instead decided to leave for Germany and try his luck there. He was however told by the personal at the German Consulate in Stockholm

116 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)
117 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)
118 Report Wednesday, 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Osar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)
119 Interrogation of Olof Sandström, 5.6.45. P4151. (RA)
120 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. P4151. (RA)



4th Company of the *SS-Infanterie-Ersatz-Btl. "Westland"* at Klagenfurt. A total of ten Swedish volunteers, including amongst others Karl-Erik "Bålsta" Nilsson, Åke Forsell, Ulph Hamilton, Heino Meyer, Elis Höglund and Erik Dahlin, are in this picture. (Author's archive)

that he had to travel via Norway, and thus he crossed the border into Norway on 22 April 1941.[121] There he was informed that he could only study at a German university if he had first served in the *Waffen-SS*, why he signed a service contract, binding him for a year. After his initial training at Sennheim, Klagenfurt and Graz, he was sent onwards to Stralsund where he applied to become a medic, as he didn't wish to participate as a fighting soldier, and believed that it would be easier to be discharged.[122] He was accepted, and after completing the education he was sent back to Klagenfurt where he came to serve as a medic at the camps infirmary.[123]

For some volunteers Klagenfurt-camp would be the final phase of their *SS* service. From *Hamilton Group,* **Ulph Hamilton** and **Åke Forsell** returned home. **Hamilton,** considered "politically unreliable", returned home in early 1942, while the latter, on receipt of a mysterious telegram notifying him of his father's death and wife's illness followed his departure not long afterwards. The father, although deceased, had passed away seven years earlier. His spouse's deteriorating condition was also false. Compassionate leave granted, **Forsell** returned to Sweden, after which he posted his uniform to the German Consulate, never to return.[124]

Arvid Johansson, according to his on testimony, was also unhappy with *SS* service. Any attempt to desert from Klagenfurt, he realised, would be difficult, thus he secretly joined a draft for the front. He subsequently stated that he "expected that he would be killed in action, and thus get away from it all".[125] He was surprised when no questions were asked about who he was or why he lacked field gear.[126] Arriving at the front that November, he was attached to an *SS* brigade in the Orel sector.[127] **Samuelsson** unsuccessfully tried to escape with the assistance of **Sandström** who

121 Interrogation of Olof Sandström, 5.6.45. P4151. (RA)
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Information provided by Åke Forsell's grandson. 11.6.06 (Author's archive) Forsell's claims are supported by several documents from the *SS*. (Author's archive)
125 Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)
126 Interview with Arvid Johansson in the documentary "Svenskarna som stred för Hitler" by Bosse Schön..
127 Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)

wrote a letter asking that the former be transferred to a Finnish unit.[128] Despite this, he found the weather "lovely", noting it had not rained a single day since arrival.[129] The situation was different on the *Ostfront*. The weather turned sharply and it began to rain steadily. That same day *'Wiking' Division* was transferred from *III. Panzer Korps* to *XIV. Panzer Korps*. Reaching Konskije-Rasdony the previous day, the reinforced *Rgt.* '*Nordland*' proceeded south towards Stara-Konstantinowka. The enemy had been encircled and during the night *Rgt.* '*Westland*' engaged an attempted break out by Soviet tanks. **Borg** and **Linnér** participated in the fighting:

> We did, at one point, attack supported by tanks to stop a breakout attempt by an encircled enemy force. The task was successful, mainly thanks to our tanks; the enemy had a large infantry superiority, which was mowed down in heaps by tanks.[130]

The *'Wiking' Division* occupied the Melitopol-Stalino highway east of Tschernigowka from where it fought off an unsuccessful breakout attempt, which ended at 1010 hours the next morning. Some 65,000 Soviet soldiers went into captivity along with a large cache of equipment. The Division continued along the highway towards Wolnowacha. Crossing the Kalmiusoch despite bad weather and increased enemy resistance, it advanced to Ignatijewka. Scattered over a distance of 100 km, the Division experienced major maintenance problems and a decline in morale. The lack of fuel also left the Division temporarily stranded.

Frontline service ended for **Borg** and **Linnér** two days later when their resignation applications were approved.[131] Departure from the front, according to the latter, was an unwelcome adventure. The roads had turned to mud which made them difficult to traverse. Entraining at Djepner-Saporosje, they were transported to Germany where they were deloused.[132] Their comrade **Rosmark** was still at Klagenfurt during this time.[133]

Arrival in Berlin was followed by a visit to Swedish military attaché **C. Juhlin Dannfelt** to whom they handed over a Russian automatic rifle and provided information about the military situation on the Eastern Front. Their opinion of the *SS* and its personnel was anything but positive, and it is clear that they were well aware of war crimes that occurred both at and behind the front:

> The halo, which rests upon the German armed forces is largely propaganda. The condition of the vehicles in the *SS* motorized divisions was very bad. Equipment storage facilities, weapons, gas cans, etc. were thrown on top of each other and on top of everything went the squad. Each one took what was nearest at hand with the result that no one could keep track of their own possessions. This caused frequent delays.
>
> Guard duty during periods of rest for front-line units was, in comparison to our Swedish methods, beneath contempt. Guards never received any instructions about the area to be covered, etc. The guard was often, when digging, eating, etc., fired upon by Russian reconnaissance patrols, particularly at night. It may also be pointed out that the Germans themselves rarely sent out reconnaissance patrols. The guards were often armed with automatic weapons.
>
> Squad meals consisted solely of *Linsensuppe*, *Getreidesuppe*, sometime pea soup or blood sausage. The result was that men, as well as the officers, suffered stomach disorders that were

128 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
129 Ibid.
130 'Experiences of Russo-German War'. R. Linnér. *Svea Gardesbladet* 1942. (KB)
131 Document from the *SS*. (Gösta Borg's personal folder) (NARA/BDC)
132 'Experiences of Russo-German War'. R.Linnér. *Svea Gardesbladet* 1942. (KB)
133 Military intelligence document stating 'Klagenfurt according to postcard' d. 20.11.41." (MUST)

manifested by diarrhea and fever. These symptoms could last weeks. Those who were evacuated were transported by car, but they would rather remain in the squads due to artillery fire. Their perception of the *SS* was a collection brutalized "Jazz Boys". This was based, inter alia, on their topics of conversation, which never rose to a higher level.

Prisoners were taken infrequently by the *SS*; only when Russians capitulated in larger units than a Company, otherwise they were shot on the spot. The prisoners were treated ruthlessly and were driven out with kicks and punches. *Flintenweiber* (Partisan women) were shot immediately. This was not only happening in the *SS*, the *Wehrmacht* did exactly the same except in the case of Jewish soldiers, who did not immediately face a firing squad. The ruthless treatment was attributed to the terrible stench which the Russians spread and their most bestial countenance.

In the occupied territories, the *SS Sonderkommandos* received assistance from a willing population, whereupon the former, including women and children, immediately faced firing squads. At one point it was written in a front journal that "the Jewish question in Russia is burning, but would be solved in a radical way".

The relationship between the *SS* and *Wehrmacht* was one of rivalry. As far as could be ascertained, the discipline was better in the latter, The Germans treated foreigners within the Company very haughtily, and talked disparagingly of Sweden in particular.

Award of the Iron Cross was perfunctory. They were awarded to the squad leaders and senior officers after a certain time, even if they had not particularly distinguished themselves. Privates could receive the Iron Cross, but only for demonstrations of bravery. The foreigners, with one exception, a Finn, were ineligible although many deserved it.

The training was not of the same high level as that in the Swedish Army. The soldier was trained to a very limited extent for autonomous action. Training did not go on to promote greater mental activity, but rather an instinctive, machine-like behavior. It would be impossible to place a German soldier by himself in Swedish forests. In this context, it is conjecture that the reason for the slowness of operations on the Murmansk front must be attributed to the fact that the Germans could not fight without proximity to a fairly good road. A German *PK Berichter* [*SS* war correspondent] spoke about the hardships in the north, hardships, which for a Swedish soldier were a "piece of cake"

The gunnery was not on the same level as in Sweden. In their units the Swedes had been superior to the others despite the fact that they did not possess any detailed knowledge of German weaponry. They argued with conviction that Swedish infantry matches that of the German on Swedish terrain, and that the latter would only stand victorious because of superiority in armour, artillery and aircraft. In any event, it would cost the Germans heavy losses if they tried to achieve a speedy resolution.

In addition, the firing line formation was not adopted. The only formation utilized was a 'spray regime', or 'shooting column', something which Swedes would call 'blob formation'. The vehicles went mostly straight to the assault jumping-off position. This often resulted in vehicles being shot to pieces by Russian artillery.

Something noted by all Germans which traveling through Sweden was the sorry sight of the Swedish guards deployed along the rail route through our country. It would be pitiful to see their bad attitude; such behavior is beneath contempt. The German laughed at them and told the informant "If Sweden is defended by those hay sacks it should immediately pack up". They stressed the desirability of urgent measures to improve our reputation. Guards should be clothed in the M39 uniform, demonstrate better posture and "avoid walking about with rifle slung over the shoulder like a hunter on his Sunday stroll."[134]

134 Confidential report. Swedish Consulate, Berlin. 29.10.41. (Author's archive)

Linnér and **Borg** were allowed to resume service with Swedish Regiment "*Svea Livgarde*" following their return, but only after a short incarceration. The former summarised his *SS* service as follows: "When I l look back, I cannot appreciate too highly what I have experienced. Not only from a military standpoint, but also, that I got to know Soviet-Russia and with my own eyes got to know the danger and threat to this great country." [135] **Linnér** remained in Sweden for the rest of the war; **Borg** re-joined the *SS* in 1943.[136]

'Wiking' Division was ordered to make a push towards Rostov with the last available fuel on 20 October. It would not be until 24 October before it could renew the offensive. Amrosiewka fell to *Rgt.* '*Nordland*' the same day. *II./Rgt.* '*Nordland*' continued through the woods south of the city before occupying the heights on the western banks of the Krynka. The entire *XIV. Panzer Korps* moved to the Mius sector to make final preparations for the assault on Rostov-Schachty. The attack commenced on 5 November when *16. Panzer Division* advanced towards Agrafenowka followed by *'Wiking' Division* which would attempt to cross the Mius at Golodajewka from where they would turn northwards to protect the northern flank of the *XIV. Panzer Korps* at Diakowo. The *I./Rgt.* '*Germania*' attempted to roll up the enemy front at Golodajewka from the south, but ran into heavy enemy resistance. Success was only achieved after the arrival of *14. Panzer Division*. The weather took a turn for the worse, turning the roads into muddy fields in which vehicles stuck fast.

Regiment '*Westland*' reached Oktjabrisk on 7 November, Meanwhile, the bulk of the Regiment turned south to support *16. Panzer Division*. It was during this time that the dreaded Soviet *Katyusha* rocket launchers were encountered for the first time. The effect was devastating on morale and created panic; this was increased by frozen ground that was too hard to dig in. The T-34 tank, against which the standard 37mm anti-tank gun had no chance, was also encountered in large numbers during this period.

The assault commenced again on 17 November. The objective was the town of Schachty, north-east of Rostov. *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' and *III./Rgt.* '*Germania*" went into defensive positions at Darjewka as the enemy tried to encircle the units. They successfully repelled these attempts until ordered to pull back on the 20th.[137] Rostov fell to *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* that same day, although battles still raged to the north.

Ingmar Joelsson, returned home on 14 November 1941 without serving at the front. Visited by **Heino Meyer** and **Gösta Borg** before their re-enlistment in the *SS* in 1943, he urged them not to do so.[138] **Bengt Rosmark,** who had been training since the summer, reached the front five days after the capture of Rostov. **Folke Nystrand**, following training, was sent to the Ukrainian front to take part in the fighting around Taganrog.[139] It is obvious that some felt those with earlier service were the lucky ones. **Heino Meyer,** who considered **Rosmark** to be one of his best friends, subsequently wrote:

> Two of my best mates from the time in Oslo have started their journey to the front. Many others have also been sent there. I can, without boasting, say that I am the best here. I thought that I, as a reward for behaving myself in the service, would be among the first to go, but

135 'Experiences of Russo-German War'. R. Linnér. *Svea Gardesbladet* 1942. (KB)

136 Stammkarte for *SS-Untersturmführer* Gösta Borg and interrogations with Gösta Borg. P2557. (NARA and RA)

137 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)

138 Interrogation of Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)

139 Article "Krigsfrivillig vid Ukrainska-fronten" *Folke Nystrand*, 1942. (Author's archive) and Dienstzeitbescheinigung Bengt Henrik Rosmark. 9.9.42. Oslo. (Author's archive)

> many of those previously sent have had a short training, could not speak a word of German or have misbehaved.[140]

The Soviets were showing signs of recovery at the front. No longer fleeing in panic, they conducted organized retreats while deteriorating weather conditions made further offensives impossible. After days of combat, Rostov was once again abandoned on 28 November 1941.

Enemy counter-attacks forced German units to retreat westwards towards the river Mius at the end of 1941. Here they would go into defensive positions for the winter. The retreat was performed in two stages: the first by crossing the river Tuslov and from there continuing towards the Mius, which was crossed on 2 December. Rostov having been abandoned, the German units took up positions along the river obstacle until summer 1942.[141] The so-called Mius Line only existed on paper, no real preparations had been made, so the defenders began to construct positions. *'Wiking's* pioneers made the most of it by burning all the houses on the east bank to deprive the enemy of available cover. The front stabilized by New Year 1941/42.

Several volunteers left *'Wiking'* in December 1941. **Lars-Owe Cassmer,** who more than likely served in a divisional *Sturmgeschütze* battery, was wounded in the middle of the month when the assault gun on which he was traveling became entangled in fallen phone lines. Alighting from the vehicle to clear the way, he was wounded in both legs by a Soviet hand grenade. **Cassmer** was shocked by the ill-treatment of Soviet prisoners, having seen POWs dying of thirst whilst German soldiers showered in water.[142] Applying for resignation whilst recovering from his injuries, the request was granted in 1942. Arrested by the *Gestapo* for recounting the horrors he had seen, he was transported to Berlin and subjected to harsh interrogations. ***Reichsmarshall*** **Hermann Göring**, he later claimed**,** was present and urged leniency. Promising to remain silent about what he had seen, he returned to Sweden without further incident. Back home by 2 February 1942, he was sentenced to 15 days confinement for desertion. Going on to study medicine, he became a doctor at the Swedish Royal Court.[143] His story of arrest and intervention by **Göring** is highly questionable. ***SS-Schütze*** **Lars Forssberg** was also wounded at this time,[144] sustaining a shrapnel wound to the lower leg on the 27 December.[145]

Hans Lindén, one of the first Swedes to reach the front and by December 1941 awarded the Iron Cross Second Class and promoted to ***SS-Sturmmann***, would also become a casualty.[146] In March 1941 he wrote:

> If I fall, then I have with my blood sealed the Aryan way of life and died for my ideals. I can die in peace, knowing that the great cause will be victorious.

The exact cause of his death at a military hospital in Stalino on 30 December 1941 remains unknown, but it was most probably due to a wound or illness.[147] Having joined "*Nordic Youth*"

140 Abstracts from letter posted by Heino Meyer, 30.11.41. Klagenfurt. (Bosse B. archive)

141 Kriegstagebuch *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. 1.4.41-25.5.42. (Petter Kjellander archive)

142 Swedish newspaper article with testimony of Cassmer 9.6.43. Hd. 4265/41. (RA) and Interrogation of Lars-Owe Andersson Cassmer, 23 and 27 August 1943. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)

143 Interrogation of Lars-Owe Andersson Cassmer. 23 and 27 August 1943. Hd. 4265/41. (RA)

144 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 9.5.42. (KB)

145 Document from Augsburg hospital. 12.2.42. (Author's archive)

146 Photo of Lindén's grave notes him as *Gefreiter*, which was a rank within the *Heer*. The *SS* equivalent was *SS-Sturmmann*.

147 Death notice of Hans Waldemar Lindén, unknown National Socialist newspaper (Author's archive) and photo of his grave marker with KIA 30.12.41.inscription.

Lars Forssberg. (Månsson-Westberg archive)

when he was 15 years old, the *Waffen-SS* sub-unit within the party front fighter organisation "Sveaborg" was designated "*Fighting unit Hans Lindén*" in his honour. **Lindén** is often claimed to have been the first Swede to fall in action whilst serving in *Waffen-SS*. However, a document signed by the Division Commander **Steiner** on the 19 September 1941 claimed that a Swedish volunteer had been killed in action. His name, however, remains unknown. The same document stated that no Swede has been awarded the Iron Cross, but five had been decorated with assault badges already by September 1941.[148]

SS-Inf.Ers.Btl. '*Westland*' and Partisan Warfare: Yugoslavia 1941/42

The Klagenfurt training for some of the Swedish volunteers was suspended in late December/early January when *3.* and *5./Ers.Bat* '*Westland*' entrained for Yugoslavia to engage partisans in cooperation with police units. Two companies, a total of 450 soldiers, under command of ***SS-Hauptsturmführer*** **Degelow** and ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Hilker,** were ordered to march towards Bischoflack on 26 December.[149] Most of the Klagenfurt Swedes belonged to *4./Ers. Btl.* '*Westland*' which was spared active service thus far. **Tor Samuelsson, Sten Olsson, Nils Sture Johansson, Karl Helmstrand, Gerhard Stolpen** and **Arne Ericsson,** serving in its 3rd

148 Aufstellung über Verluste und Aufzeichnungen der germanischen Freiwilligen. (19.9.1941). (NARA)
149 T-175 / 107 /2631115. (NARA)

Hans Lindén while serving in *SS-Flak-Abt 5 'Wiking'*. (Charles Trang)

Hans Lindén's grave at Stalino Military Cemetery. (Göran Hargestam)

or 5th companies were also sent to Yugoslavia.[150] The latter would claim he served there between September 1941 and February 1942. **Gunnar Eklöf**, who served within a unknown company, subsequently related he had served there until about February 1942.[151]

Notification of the deployment reached the volunteers on the evening of 25 December. They set out, having prepared all the equipment and collected their winter uniforms, at 07:00 the next morning. **Samuelsson** briefly remarked that "the purpose of this expedition is to deal with some rebels who dwell there."[152]

The designated area was reached on 27 December; the two companies went into blocking positions in order to halt enemy activity between Log and Billichgrazt. It was, however, observed that partisan knowledge of the wooded terrain provided them with the ability to slip through German lines unnoticed.[153] 5th Company occupied Hill 920 that same day after suffering four dead and four seriously wounded. On the evening of the second day *3./Ers.Bat* '*Westland*' held point 687, losing several men from frostbite; *5./Ers.Bat* '*Westland*' held hills 948, 898 and 920. The following day, both companies moved out towards positions extending from Trata and Todraz.[154]

The action was – according to the Regimental commander – a search and destroy mission covering a total of 7 kilometres. It proved a difficult task, as the partisans were familiar with the area and could evade their pursuers, especially at night. The Regimental commander subsequently stated that it would take a full Division with all the necessary equipment to prevent this from happening.[155]

The Regiment received orders to occupy the line Bischoflack – Trata and Trata – Lutschana on the 30 December 1941. This was necessary since it was believed a partisan unit of about 300 men would attack towards Pölland where 44 German field police soldiers had been murdered ten days earlier. Against all expectations, no combat occurred.[156] Finally, on 3 January 1942, the two companies returned to Klagenfurt to resume training.[157] The men were thanked by the school commander, who felt they had behaved well. This was followed by two days' free time before training continued.[158] **Eklöf** had, however, fallen ill and was sent home to Sweden on leave in his *SS* uniform, which created some commotion.[159]

Stolpen suffered a frostbite injury to the toes whilst standing guard.[160] Evacuated to the Klagenfurt hospital, he feigned insanity and refused to eat. A sympathetic doctor asked him whether he wanted a discharge, which he accepted. Sent home on 13 March 1942,[161] he received a good service rating from his superior officer.[162]

The Battalion commander, ***SS-Sturmbannführer* Strathmann**, proposed what he deemed an effective response to partisan threat by stating that all Slovenian-speaking civilians should be

150 Tor Samuelsson's diary (Author's archive), Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 1.2.44. XII 83/Ä 2224 (RA), letter to Sten Olsson, 17.11.41. P3959 (RA) Interrogation of Nils Sture Johansson, 2.4.44. XII 83/Ä 2312 (RA) and letter from Gerhard Olof Stolpen to Ulph Hamilton. 2.4.42. XII83/Ä 3381. (RA)

151 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf, 8.10.45. P3592. (RA)

152 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

153 T-175 / 107 /2631116 and T-175 / 107 /2631117. (NARA)

154 T-175 / 107 /2631120. (NARA)

155 T-175 / 107 /2631120 and T-175 / 107 /2631121. (NARA)

156 T-175 / 107 /2631121. (NARA)

157 T-175 / 107 /2631122. (NARA)

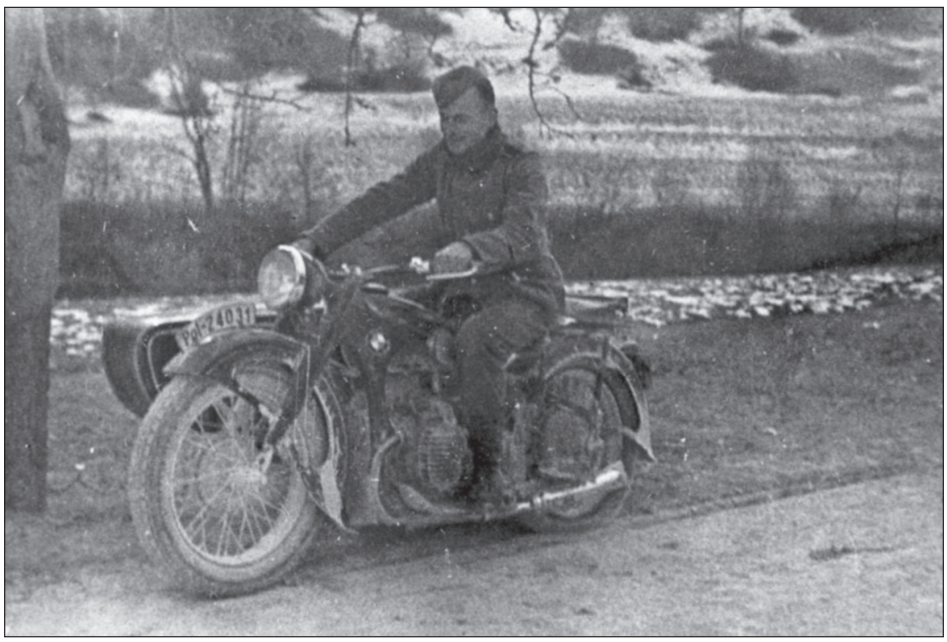
158 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

159 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf, 8.10.45. P3592. (RA)

160 *Expressen* 5.7.77. (KB)

161 Entlassungsschein, Klagenfurt den 13.3.42. Gerhard Olof Stolpen. (Author's archive)

162 Compilation of interviews with *SS-Schütze* Stolpen, Olof Gerhard. 9.3.83. (Author's archive)



A picture taken by Tor Samuelsson during the anti-partisan warfare in the Balkans, winter of 1941/42. (Bosse B. archive).

Gunnar Eklöf was sent home to Sweden on leave in early 1942 following his illness in Yugoslavia. In Sweden he freely walked around dressed in his *SS* uniform. This photo is taken in Sweden during that period. He has pinned his *Sveaborg* and *SSS* party membership badges to the breast of his coat. (A.P.S archive)

Gerhard Olof Stolpen. (Bosse B. archive)

viewed as hostile. All men 15 years or older, he added, should be confined to work camps.[163] The true face of anti-partisan warfare revealed itself to the Swedish volunteers. **Stolpen** recalled the following incident during a post-war interview:

> At one point we had taken a young Yugoslav as a guide. He would show us to the partisan camp, but suddenly we were fired upon. And then ... our platoon leader drew his pistol and in cold blood shot the Yugoslav in the back ... it was one of the most devilish things I've ever seen.[164]

Meanwhile, Swedish nationals continued to enlist in the *SS*. From Stockholm came circus artist **Marcus Ledin** (b.1921). In possession of a passport, he traveled to Norway in November 1941. From there he continued by boat to Germany and onwards to Sennheim in January 1942.[165] It is uncertain whether **Ledin** sympathized with the National Socialist ideology but, according to those who met him, his enlistment was engendered by a hatred of communism.[166] Making his way to Norway at the same time was former police commissioner **Harry Olsson**. Having served in both the Winter War and the Hanko Front, he proceeded to Norway to enlist after discharge. His political motives remain unknown, but others testified he was an alcoholic who would do anything for money.

Summary

The German invasion stalled and came to a halt as 1941 ended. Hopes of a quick victory faded, and the fighting descended to static warfare. There had been many Swedish recruits, but few who participated in the fighting. Two, **Hans Lindén** and **Frank Gustavsson**, served with *'Wiking'* during the early stages of the invasion**..** Another group – **Gösta Borg, Ragnar Linnér, Frans Wahlberg, Kurt Allan Lundin, Lars Forssberg** and **Lars-Owe Cassmer –** arrived at the front following accelerated training. More Swedes – **Fred Nilsson** and **Bengt Rosmark** are confirmed – arrived as the weather took a turn for the worse**.** Two more – **Karl Helmstrand** and **Folke Nystrand** are likely to have arrived at the same time. **Arvid Johansson** managed to desert after which he served with another unit, while others participated in anti-partisan operations. However, as 1942 began, a number of volunteers had left *'Wiking'*: **Gösta Borg** and **Ragnar Linnér** were discharged; **Hans Lindén** and one unknown Swede were killed in action whilst **Lars Forssberg** and **Lars-Owe Cassmer** were wounded.

1942: SECOND YEAR IN THE EAST

Holding the Mius Line

The Finnish Volunteer Battalion finally joined the Division in early January 1942. The original idea had been to organize the newly-arrived unit as the *IV./ Rgt.* '*Nordland*' but, III Battalion having sustained heavy losses, its personnel were distributed amongst the other battalions and the Finnish battalion was incorporated as the new III./Rgt. *'Nordland'*. '*Wiking' Division* spent

163 T-175 / 107 /2631124 and T-175 / 107 /2631125. (NARA)
164 *Expressen* 5.7.77. (KB)
165 Security policer folder of Marcus Ledin. (RA)
166 Unnamed document with information concerning Bengt Rune Marcus Ledin. 4.8.44. (RA)

Marcus Ledin shortly after joining the *SS* in early 1942. (Author's archive)

January and February fighting in frigid weather conditions during which and both sides suffered severe casualties. **Folke Nystrand** recollected in a contemporary journal article:

> January and February were two horribly cold months during which the Bolsheviks – without achieving notable successes – sacrificed hundreds of thousands of Russian lives with unspeakable ruthlessness … Against our automatic weapons the Red cavalry attacked – a diabolical cruelty to both men and animals![167]

Nystrand, having contracted frostbite, returned home in late February. Sent home following contract expiry, he later informed authorities, he claimed a willingness to fulfil his military service obligation, after which he would re-enlist in the *SS*. It was, however, rumoured amongst former comrades that his primary motivation was cowardice and he would never return.[168] Conversely, available documentation appears to show that the frostbite was a result of the short-lived Yugoslavian venture and it is unsure if he served at the Russian front, as claimed in the article.[169] **Svinhufvud**, whom had enlisted with **Nystrand**, had also returned home by then. Not much is known about his service; Swedish authorities recorded previous service with '*Westland*', but it was probably with the *Ersatz-Btl.* at Klagenfurt. The reason for his discharge is also unknown. He married a Norwegian Jew shortly afterwards.[170] **Karl Arnold Engström** was the third volunteer, according to **Gunnar Eklöf**, to return home during this period.

167 'Volunteer at the Ukrainian Front', Folke Nystrand. P3432. (RA).
168 Interrogation of Folke Nystrand, 30.10.42. P3432. (RA)
169 Information provided by Folke Nystrand's son, who claimed that Gunnar Eklöf saved his father's leg.
170 Promemoria 21.10.42. P3432. (RA) and List of Swedes in German service. 27.3.44. P.3432. (RA).

Bengt Rosmark preparing to throw the M24 'potato masher' hand grenade. (Bosse B. archive)

Volunteers enlisting during the late summer of 1941 were sent to reinforce *'Wiking'* along the Mius River line in early 1942. Indeed, a document dated 15 January recorded a total of 39 men serving.[171] Thus 1942 was the year that the highest number of Swedish volunteers served within the Division but, unlike their Finnish compatriots, it was decided to eschew organization into a single unit. The reason for this appears to have been a concern of losing all of them at the same time.

On 30 January 1942, *SSS* party organ *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* published a letter by a volunteer that related how the author and a Danish colleague, assigned to secure a flank during a raid on a village to secure prisoners. Separated from each other during the subsequent withdrawal, the isolated Swede managed to run into a fellow countryman. A fierce firefight was followed during which the pair made their escape. Unfortunately, the author of this volume, although provided with a name, has been unable to identify the correspondent.[172]

Medic **Olof Sandström** had been sent to Berlin to work at a large military hospital in late 1941. Participating in an NCO training course simultaneously, he finished the programme the following January. Returning to Klagenfurt, he served as a medic with the rank of *SS-Oberscharführer*. Remaining there until the end of March 1942, he returned to Berlin to serve as a *Kriegsberichter*. **Sandström** would later become a liaison *NCO* at the *SS-Hauptamt – Germanische Leitstelle*, whilst acting simultaneously as national secretary for the *SSS* party in Germany.[173]

Meanwhile, a handful of Swedes left Klagenfurt for the front. Traveling through Poland, **Samuelsson** observed in his diary:

171 T-175/R-110/2633910. (NARA)
172 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 30.1.42. (KB)
173 Interrogation of Olof Sandström, 5.6.45. P4151. (RA)

Heino Meyer pictured whilst serving as an enlisted man. (Author's archive)

> We are five Swedes in the compartment ... Svensson[174] was left behind, a Norwegian and a Dane are also with us, everything so Scandinavian tidy. We've stopped, probably for the night, at a place called Brusk – *Deutsche Reichsbahn*, Saturday, 14 February 1942 "[175]

The five Swedes were, in addition to **Samuelsson,** more than likely as follows: **Arne Ericsson**, **Ragnar Johansson I**, **Sten** "**Stesse**" **Olsson** and **Karl-Erik** '**Bålsta**' **Nilsson**, all members of the *Hamilton Group*. Their train arrived in Krakow on 18 February and, crossing the Ukrainian border on the 27th, reached Dnepropetrovsk on 9 March. Detraining at Amwrosiewka, they were immediately assigned to *Rgt. 'Nordland'*. Seeking transfer to the Finnish volunteer Battalion, fellow countryman **Kurt Lundin**, who served in *15./Rgt. 'Westland',* attempted to persuade them to join his company. The new arrivals were, nonetheless, eventually scattered throughout the Division. Another trainload of volunteers, including **Heino Meyer**, arrived on 26 March.[176] **Samuelsson** and his comrades were employed as prison guards; two of the prisoners escaped, after which four were shot.[177]

The *'Eklöf Group's* experience was quite different. **Bengt Olsson** and possibly **Folke Nystrand** joined *'Wiking'* but a number of their comrades never reached the Ukraine. **Gunnar Eklöf** served in Yugoslavia before falling ill.[178] Returning there in May 1942, he served for another four weeks before being sent for NCO training at Klagenfurt. Following graduation and promotion to

174 Svensson's identity has not been fully established; he might be Carl Svensson. (See Chapter 7)

175 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

176 Carl Martin von Zeipel (b. 1923. Information from the State Police 3rd Division, concerning individual who applied for allowance to acquire firearms. Dnr. 1519 Vap. I. 1948. 23.8.48. XII83 Ä 2155. (RA)

177 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

178 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf 8.10.45. P3592. (RA)

SS-Unterscharführer in December 1942, he went on leave and was, upon his return, transferred to the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz*. Thus it seems likely he never actually served with the Division. The only time **Sven Rydén** was part of *'Wiking'* was during training at Klagenfurt. He was subsequently given a Berlin desk job due to his age. More Swedes left the Division at this time. ***SS-Rottenführer* Frans Wahlberg** of *Rgt. Westland*' was evacuated to a field hospital because of frostbite as of late February 1942.[179] Another *Hamilton Group* member returned home on 28 March. **Åke Söderberg**, discharged at the request of his parents, would not see active service[180] ***SS-Schütze* Lars Forssberg** left under more tragic circumstances, the previous shrapnel wound inflicted in late December 1941 having led to complications. Evacuation to Sweden denied for political reasons, he died at the military hospital in Augsburg. A military parade was held in his honour, complete with a tribute from **Adolf Hitler.** He was the eleventh *SSS* party member to fall in action, his passing receiving much attention by the party newspaper with at least four articles chronicling his exploits and death.[181] His ashes were buried in Sweden on the 17 May, 1942 at Rådmansö Cemetery. The ceremony was attended by *SSS* standard-bearers; his father described him as a young man who gave his life for his country and for Europe.[182]

The volunteers who arrived at the front that spring completed final training in the rear area at the beginning of May, after which they were divided amongst *'Wiking's* component units. Some would, however, arrive much later. **Elis Höglund** left Klagenfurt on 9 March, but would not reach the front until the summer due to illness.[183] **Karl-Erik** "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** had suffered the same fate, but made a speedy recovery and joined the division at the beginning of April.[184] The volunteers appear to have been placed in the following units:

Regiment '*Germania*'
Arne Ericsson – I Battalion.[185]
Sten "**Stesse**" **Olsson –** Unknown Company.[186]
Heino Meyer – 9th Company
Tor Samuelsson – 10th Company
Nils Sture Johansson – Unknown company.

Regiment 'Nordland'
Erik Dahlin – 2nd Company

Regiment '*Westland*'
Karl-Erik "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** – 2nd Company[187]
Ragnar Johansson I – Rear echelon transport unit.[188]

179 Compilation of Case Hd. 3660/40. P4820. (RA) and letter to Frans Wahlberg, 28.2.42. P4820. (RA)
180 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
181 Augsburg hospital document 12.2.42 (Author's archive) and *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 9.5.42, 16.9.42 and 23.5.42. (KB)
182 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 23.5.42. (KB)
183 Elis Höglund's Wehrpass. (Author's archive)
184 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
185 Correspondence with Arne Ericsson, 11.8.42. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
186 Short summary of Sten Olsson's service. 4.8.44. P3959. (RA)
187 Nilsson's service dossier states he was assigned to *2./Rgt.* "*Westland*". (Author's archive)
188 Memorandum concerning the metalworker Nils Ragnar Johansson. 27.2.47. XII 83/Ä 632. (RA)

Lars Forssberg in a picture that was published in the many memorial articles by the Swedish National Socialist press. (Author's archive)

"Bålsta" Nilsson and "Stesse" Olsson outside the local *Feldpost* office. (Author's archive)

Arvid Johansson, the Swede who joined the Hamilton group in Stralsund, had by this time already seen action with the *SS Brigade* to which he was attached; he earned the Eastern Front Medal and the Wound Badge for his services. Reporting to Swedish authorities in May 1942, he lacked the necessary documentation, his passport and other identity papers having been lost during a Soviet assault outside Trudi (east of Orel) on 27 December 1941.[189] The horrifically cold winter had taken its toll on him with a severe case of frostbite. Subsequent recovery in various military hospitals was followed by leave in Denmark, where he once again made plans to desert. Sent back to the Klagenfurt training camp before he could act, he once again petitioned to join *SS Infanterie Ers-Bat.* '*Westland*'. Assigned to an *SS-Panzer-Regiment* shortly, he served as tailor and later saw action outside of Kharkov during 1943. He was discharged during the summer of that year.[190]

Frank Gustavsson, his previous bought of rheumatism having been cured, returned to the Division in spring 1942. He would however only serve in the Division for three more months, before once again falling ill with the same decease. This time he requested resignation which was granted, but only if he agreed to join the *SS* once again if the war would turn against Germanys favor. During the fall of 1942 he would once again be called up for service, but did not see action with the *'Wiking' Division*.[191]

The Mius Line sector remained wet and muddy. Conditions began to improve with the arrival of spring. **Kurt Lundin** recalled:

> The sun shines from a cloudless sky and it is dead calm; perfectly still. It causes the earth to steam. It is possible to walk some 200 metres without stepping through mud which reaches the top of the boots. We have had some real God-given weather over the last five days; it is easy to believe spring has arrived. The sun shines without it being frost-clear ... And so the ground dries before the next big assignment. Then we shall storm the Bolshevik positions and turn them upside down, destroy them and put an end to this misery.

It would be a few weeks more before major operations commenced. The spring of 1942 was relatively calm and hostilities were limited to patrol, sniper activity, artillery and air bombardments whilst *'Wiking' Division* geared up for the coming summer offensive. Minor operations during 21-25 April, according to a Division document, cost three dead and eight wounded.[192] **Samuelsson** described the tedium in his diary:

> Still, nothing of importance has happened. The Russians shoot from time to time and we respond. I await the mail but there is none ... Mius, Friday, May 15th 1942.

A Norwegian volunteer serving with **Erik Dahlin** also noted another week of good weather and, despite aerial attacks, relative calm at the front. The defenders underwent training and improved their positions. This continued into June. "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** subsequently observed:

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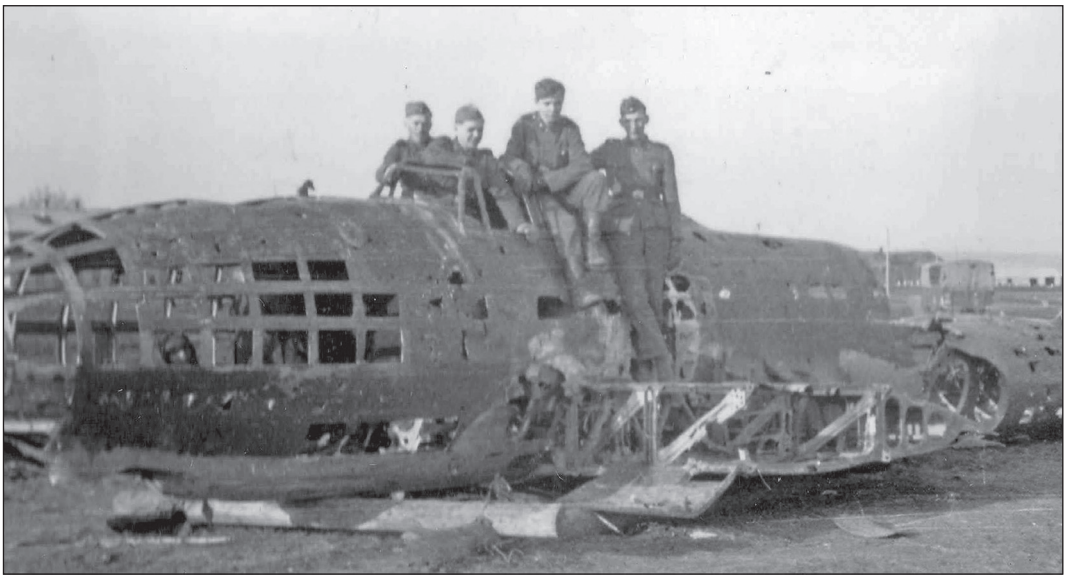
189 Letter to Landsfogden C. Rosengren, Malmö from A. Ljungdahl, kriminalpolisen 6:e rotel. 21.5.42. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)

190 Interrogation of Arvid Ragnvald Johansson, 22.11.45.XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA) and Service in the *Ers.Btl.* "*Westland*" according to letter addressed to him, 17.4.42. XII 83/Ä 2309. (RA)

191 Report, Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Osar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)

192 T-175 / 107 / 2631080. (NARA)



The spoils of war: Arne Ericsson, unknown, Karl-Erik "Bålsta" Nilsson and Sten "Stesse" Olsson pose on a wrecked Soviet bomber. (Author's archive)

> On the Mius front my group had an outpost that we monitored. One night a guard went missing; I wondered where the hell he was. In the empty foxhole was a little piece of paper on which was written in German "Keep better watch! Ivan." The guy was gone. The Russians had taken him … The Russian snipers were too good. One of my Danish friends raised his head one too many times and got a bullet right in the forehead.[193]

For **Lundin**, there would be no "storming of Bolshevik positions". Removed from the front on 5 May 1942, he had been wounded twice and decorated. Promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer,* he enrolled at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* in August 1942. His time there proved short-lived and he was sent home.[194] He later revealed a number of Divisional war crimes known to him during interrogation by Swedish authorities:

> During the campaign, however, he had second thoughts regarding Nazism, which in his meaning did not in reality correspond to the theoretical ideal and disseminated propaganda. This was especially true after he participated in the occupation of Husiantyn in Russia. In the town hall basement, the German troops found approximately 8,000 mutilated corpses of former kulaks /independent farmers and those who might possibly greet the invaders with joy and join the Germans. The Company to which Lundin belonged had been instructed to clear the city of partisans. Another *Waffen-SS* company started gathering people in the town hall basement to be executed before his company's arrival. Most were Jews. All were commanded to carry out the mutilated bodies and bury them. There Lundin encountered an old Jew who could not bear to carry the corpses. An *SS* man forced him to lie down among the bodies, after which the Jew was shot with a bullet to the neck. The burial parties were then forced to dig their own graves; some were shot with a bullet to the neck at the grave. Others were forced

193 *Expressen*, 4.7.77. (KB)
194 Interrogation of Kurt Allan Lundin, 24.12.43. P3895. (RA)

> to stand and be beaten to death with the rifle butts. Some were forced to kill each other with the promise that the survivor would be spared. These, however, were also shot.
>
> Throughout his campaign experience, the Division Viking [sic.], to which he himself belonged, took no prisoners and killed everyone and everything that came within the Division's path as a result, officers and men, who during reconnaissance missions had been captured, have been found dead and mutilated. Captain Bredemeyer had been found dead with his eyes gouged and ears, tongue and genitals cut off and stuffed into his mouth. These deeds outraged the Division's soldiers. This is why no prisoners had been taken for several months.[195]

Lundin also related a sinister encounter with a member of the *Einsatzgruppen,*[196] who boasted of a massacre of 30,000 Jews south of Kiev.[197] It should however be mentioned that some of the incidents related by **Lundin** must have been hearsay as they occurred prior to his time at the front. As a matter of fact, **Lundin** informed his interrogators that he had dissociated himself from National Socialist ideology and would later excuse his actions by claiming he was trying for form a sabotage unit that would operate in Denmark against the German occupiers. This considered attempt disassociate himself from *SS* membership is belied by former comrades who related how **Lundin** bragged about his wartime experiences.

Elis Höglund was assigned to *6./Rgt.* "*Westland*" in early June.[198] **Fred Nilsson** was sent back to Klagenfurt for recovery from a wound about the same time. There he met with **Frans Wahlberg** who had been transferred from a field hospital in Poland for further treatment. They would be treated by Swedish orderly, **Urban Linding**, who informed his countrymen how he provided the Germans with nautical charts of the Swedish coast.[199] **Linding** also told them about his German fiancée, whose father was a Bavarian priest who had been a member of the *NSDAP* since 1923. Through him, he became acquainted with important people who arranged medical school enrollment and promised employment with the German Red Cross.[200] **Linding**, having disgraced "both himself and his parents", enlisted in the *SS* during a subsequent period of depression. Surviving the war without serious injury, he lost both legs and one arm in a train accident whist making his way home in 1945. Queried about his earlier hospital claims to his fellow countrymen in 1947, he stated the tales were fabricated in a bid to elevate his own importance. He also stated that no crimes were perpetrated; adding that he would take responsibility if any actually occurred as he was nonetheless relegated to a lifetime as a cripple.[201]

Fred Nilsson was recovering from shrapnel wounds when he received a letter informing him that he had been discharged.[202] The reason was that he was a minor and had joined the *SS* without his parents' permission. They had contacted the Swedish foreign ministry for assistance in getting him home. After contacts with the German authorities he was released from his contract.[203] He

195 Ibid.

196 Lundin referred to a so-called 'Jew Company that was probably the notorious *Einsatzgruppe.*

197 The atrocity in question was, more than likely, the notorious Babi Yar Massacre (29-30 September 1941) during which 33,771 Jews were executed.

198 Elis Höglund's Wehrpass. (Author's archive)

199 Interrogation of Frans Wahlberg. 2.6.46. P4820. (RA)

200 Ibid.

201 P.M. concerning interrogation on 24 September 1947 with Swedish citizen and journalist Urban Bertrand Linding, born 22/7 1915 in Lysekil now residing at Skånegatan 31 in Göteborg. HA:853/47. (RA)

202 Interrogation of Karl Fred Ingvar Nilsson, 7.6.43. P3742. (RA).

203 Correspondence from Fred Nilsson's father to Swedish Foreign Department. 6.5.42. (Author's archive)

Kurt Lundin in civilian life. (Bosse B. archive)

was sent back to Sweden via Norway, where he arrived on 19 August 1942.[204] He would however join the *SS* once again in 1943, but just as before he lacked his parents' permission and was sent home.[205]

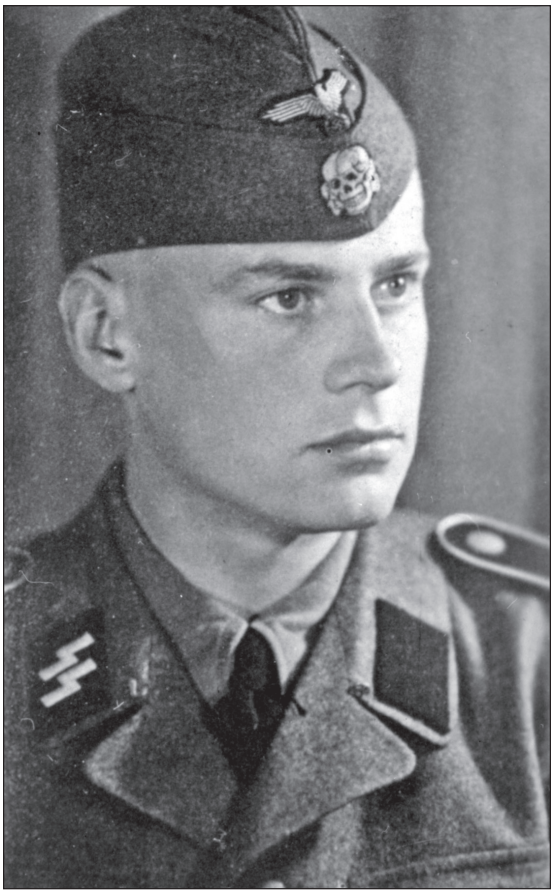
Having recovered from frostbite, **Frans Wahlberg** participated in an NCO course after which he was promoted to *SS* Unterscharführer.[206]

Sickness and wounds were common amongst the Swedish volunteers. **Gösta Borg**, now back in Sweden, maintained correspondence with **Bengt Rosmark** during the latter's service with *Regiment* '*Westland*'. The former wrote on 3 June of how he despised the Swedish Communists and missed his time with the *SS*, the letter was addressed to a military hospital where **Rosmark** had been admitted after falling ill in May.[207] **Tor Samuelsson's** trench foot worsened around this time; he was subsequently sent to a hospital to have it treated.[208]

Overview

As the summer of 1942 blossomed, many of the Swedes, undergoing training since 1941 reached the front; others had been with the Division since the start of Barbarossa. Of those trained quickly at Breslau, **Lars Forssberg** was dead and **Frans Wahlberg** and **Kurt Allan Lundin** had been sent away due to sickness or wounds. Neither would return to the *'Wiking' Division*.

204 Interrogation of Karl Fred Ingvar Nilsson, 28.5.43. P3742. (RA)
205 Ibid.
206 Interrogation of Frans Wahlberg, 1.6.46. P4820. (RA)
207 P.M. to case Hd. 3268/40 and Hd. 7080/40. 3.6.42. P2204. (RA)
208 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)



Bengt Rosmark. (Bosse B. archive)

Trainees from Klagenfurt and Graz had reached *'Wiking' Division* in 1941 but, as the summer approached, they too were removed from active service never to return; **Frank Gustavsson**, who likely served with the Division since the invasion had fallen ill. **Fred Nilsson** and **Bengt Rosmark**, who arrived at the front the previous autumn, were evacuated to hospital. The situation was the same for **Folke Nystrand,** who claimed to having been in combat in Ukraine from New Year's 1941/42.

Karl Helmstrand 1941 service with the Division remains uncertain. Having recruited himself to the politically motivated '*Eklöf Group*', together with **Folke Nystrand,** there were in addition, six others confirmed to have joined the *SS*, The only confirmed member to participate in the summer offensive was **Bengt Olsson.** Two more remained in the *SS* but not with *'Wiking' Division*.

Conversely, the *Hamilton Group* was lured into *SS* service. One deserted whilst on leave – **Åke Forsell,** and three others were discharged: Group leader **Ulph Hamilton**, **Olof Stolpen** (at his own request while at Klagenfurt) and **Åke Söderberg** (on his parents request shortly after reaching the front). The rest: **Tor Samuelsson, Nils Sture Johansson, Arne Ericsson, Ragnar Johansson I, Sten Olsson** and **Karl-Erik Nilsson** had, however been absorbed by the Division and were ready for combat. Likewise for a few other – **Elis Höglund, Erik Dahlin** and **Heino Meyer –** volunteers who recruited themselves individually or in smaller groups during 1941. Therefore at least nine volunteers eagerly awaited their baptism of fire.

Summer offensive 1942: Heino Meyers (second from left). Note the divisional sun wheel swastika insignia on the lorry. (Author's archive)

Summer Offensive of 1942

Plans for the German summer offensive had been drawn up by spring 1942. The idea was that *Heeresgruppe Süd* would conduct an eastward drive to the Caucasus mountains and the River Volga to secure the region's massive oil reserves.

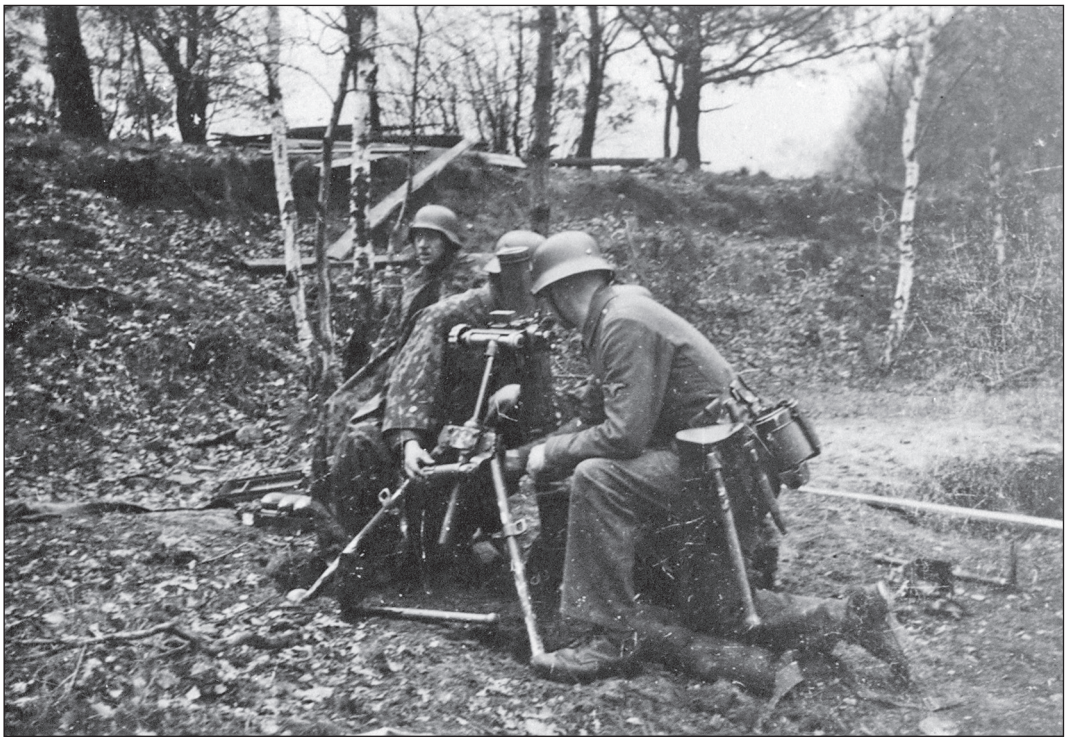
'Wiking' Division was relieved on both sides of Golodajewka on 16 July. Deployed to Taganrog from where the Ssambek bridgehead would be opened by the *LVII. Panzer-Korps*, *'Wiking'* and *13. Panzer Division* would advance towards Rostov and thus open the door to the Caucasus range. **Samuelsson** returned to his company after convalescing in Dnjepropetrovsk; at the same time, the long awaited *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5* joined the division. *'Wiking'* was almost brought up to full strength with the exception of vehicles during the spring. The offensive commenced on 21 July. *'Wiking'* advanced along the Ssambek-Sinjawka-Tschaltyr Road to the northeast. The aforementioned lack of vehicles, however, forced *Rgt.* '*Westland*' and *III./Rgt.* '*Nordland* to relinquish their motor transport to other units within the division.

Rostov, lost during the planned withdrawal to the Mius Line in late 1941, was the first goal. The great industrial city was defended by three large anti-tank ditches. The attackers, however, had surprise and momentum and the enemy was soon surrendering in droves. The Germans entered the city on 23 July. The Soviets retired with the invaders in pursuit. Morale was high amongst the latter, something which "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** described:

> It was absolutely fantastic. Behind was the Ukraine with its cornfields as far as the eye could see. Now we picked oranges and tangerines from trees. The atmosphere was at its peak. I recall our Divisional commander General Felix Steiner on one occasion during the advance to the Caucasus came rushing up in his Volkswagen jeep and joked that we probably would meet General Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in Jerusalem.[209]

209 *Expressen*, 4.7.77. (KB)

Summer Offensive 1942: Heino Meyer's squad prepares a meal. (Author's archive)



GrW 34 8cm medium mortar: Karl-Erik "Bålsta" Nilsson is on the far right.
(Månsson-Westberg archive)

A pre-war photo of Erik Dahlin. (Bosse B. archive)

The crossing of the Don commenced on 25 July when *XXXXIX. Gebirgs-Korps* crossed the river and occupied the town of Bataisk. The *13. Panzer Division* crossed on the 27th, followed by *'Wiking'* in the early hours of the 28th. From there it turned north towards Olginskaja and engaged the enemy at Kagalnizkaja. Bitter fighting raged with Soviet rear guards that were pursued to the Kuban peninsular on the 29th. The enemy was allowed no respite to organize a defence. All such attempts were smashed by the *Luftwaffe*'s close air support. This would prove fatal for one of the volunteers.

At 05.00 on the 1st of August, *2./Rgt.* '*Nordland*', in which **Erik Dahlin** served, was ordered to move out. The troops consumed their breakfast on trucks whilst being transported from Jegorlykskaja. During the advance they witnessed seemingly endless columns of captured Soviets marching in the opposite direction. Suddenly, three planes appeared in the sky above. **Dahlin** had time to remark they were German before the column was strafed by friendly fire. The bombs killed a total of nine men, including the unfortunate **Dahlin**. Of the other eight, three were Norwegian volunteers.[210] His Company commander ***SS-Obersturmführer* Herbert Pässler** wrote a condolence letter to his mother, mentioning nothing about her son being killed by friendly fire. He added that the deceased left no possessions but promised to post any that might turn up.[211] **Tor Samuelsson** was awarded the Eastern Front Medal and received his promotion to ***SS-Sturmmann*** not long after **Dahlins** death.[212]

210 Ivarsson, p 143. The information was gleaned from Norweigan Volunteer Svein Lothe, who travelled in the same truck as Erik Dahlin.

211 Letter from *SS-Ostuf.* Herb. Pässler (company commander *2./Rgt* '*Nordland*') to Dahlin's mother: 'In the field, August 1942'. (Author's archive)

212 Tor Samuelsson's diary and award document. (Author's archive)

Caucasus Front September 1942: Tor Samuelsson on the day he was promoted to *SS-Sturmmann*. (Author's archive)

Summer offensive 1942: the Soviet landscape is clearly seen in Marcus Ledin's photograph. (Månsson-Westberg archive)

His loss was compensated by the arrival of another Swede. **Marcus Ledin** was assigned to *7./Rgt.* '*Westland*' as a machine-gunner.[213] News that his mother was dying arrived the following month. His father urged him to return home that August. He remained in the *SS* for another two years before transferring to *'Nordland' Division* in 1944.

Wiking's next objective was Maikop. Krapotkin fell to *Regiment* '*Nordland*' on 5 August; another Swedish volunteer – **Bengt Olsson,** a former member of *Eklöf Group* – was killed that same day.[214] The Division, despite heavy losses, pressed on reaching Maikop on 8 August. The Belaja was reached by *I./Rgt.* '*Germania*' two days later; the nearby oil refinery on 14 August. Meanwhile, *II./Rgt.* '*Germania*' successfully fended off counter-attacks between Maikop and Tuapse with support from artillery and *Nebelwerfers*.

The fall of Maikop was succeeded by a drive on Tuapse. The Division was about to encounter new terrain consisting of mountains and dense forests. Relieved and transported to the eastern Caucuses in support of *1. Panzer Armee*, it was concentrated around Appollonskaja on 20 August. **Karl-Erik** "**Bålsta**" **Nilsson** was wounded while serving in the *2./Rgt.* '*Westland*' one week later after a brutal encounter with a Soviet soldier: "I ran my head into his crotch, he tumbled over me but managed to squeeze the trigger. The shot entered the throat, passed through the lung and out the side"[215]

The wound was serious enough for **Nilsson** to seek a discharge. This was granted in May 1943.[216] He was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class, Black Wound Badge and promoted ***SS-Sturmmann***.[217] He died in Sweden in 1986. His immediate post-war years were spent as a servant for **Ulph Hamilton**.

NEW RECRUITS: SUMMER/FALL 1942

More volunteers joined during the second half of 1942 and, as in 1941 several would serve at the front with *'Wiking' Division*. Nevertheless, many of them chose desertion or were discharged. On the 11 June the student **Sten Eriksson** (b.1920) deserted from the Swedish Army in order to join the *SS*.[218] Querying the German Consulate in Helsingborg about joining *SS-Standarte* '*Nordland'* as early as February 1941; it is not known whether he received a reply to the enquiry.[219] His motives appear rather complex. A Swedish national with no known links to National Socialism beyond an *SSS* party application submitted while serving in the *SS*, his former school inspector recollected a young man with pacifist tendencies who may have been driven to follow the course he did as an expression of despair resulting from scholastic troubles and the fact that both his parents had died. Indeed, he attempted suicide sometime during 1939-40.[220]

Shortly after **Eriksson's** desertion, **Harry Olsson** was discharged from the *SS*. The former police commissar, who recruited himself to the *SS* in January 1942, was sent home from the Klagenfurt training camp. He would subsequently convince another countryman to recruit to enlist in the *SS*.

213 Letter to Marcus Ledin, August 1942. The Feldpost number denotes *7./Rgt. Westland* 31/7 1942 -9/2 1943. (Author's archive).

214 List of Swedish citizens, who, according to information provided by 6th Police Division, have fallen in action during *Waffen-SS* Service. 1.3.46. 50:6/4. (RA)

215 *Expressen*, 27.7.82. (KB)

216 Deutsche Gesandschaft der Militärattaché. Stockholm, 12.10.43. (Author's archive)

217 Karl Erik Nilsson Iron Cross Second Class, Wound Badge documents, Promotion document and Entlassungsschein *SS-Sturmmann* 10.5.43. (Author's archive)

218 Case compilation Hd. 1209/41. (RA)

219 Letter from Sten Eriksson to Deutscher Consulate, Helsingborg. 10.2.41. Hd. 1209/41. (RA)

220 Report Thursday 20 February 1941 concerning Eriksson, Sten Folke. Hd. 1209/41. (RA)

Heino Meyer (kneeling to the right) with his squad during the Tuapse fighting. (Author's archive)

Karl-Erik "Bålsta" Nilsson. (Bosse B. archive)

Eriksson would be followed by more Norwegian-bound volunteers during August. On 4 August, **Per Hagberg** and **Lennart Nisseby,** both professional soldiers and *SSS*-members, volunteered for the *SS*. Just as with **Eriksson,** both were born in 1920 and served together with the *I5 Ranger Regiment* from where they had deserted. Both had previously served as volunteers in Finland, **Hagberg** as a machine-gunner during the Winter War and **Nisseby** as a squad leader on the Hanko Front in 1941. **Hagberg** had also sought permission to join the volunteers at the Hanko Front, but was rejected for unknown reasons. This was, according to some sources, the reason he joined the *SS*.[221]

That same month, **Erik Silfverhjelm** (b. 1909) made his way to Norway. A father of two who had worked as an actor, it was not the first time he had volunteered. Previous Winter War service was followed by (according to himself) services as a Norwegian volunteer during the German invasion. Subsequent claims to have fought until early July, after which he returned home, remain unconfirmed. Serving as a driver in Finland between July and December 1941, he took up civilian employment in Sweden prior to *SS* enlistment.[222]

His reasons, he later observed, were a combination of unfavourable working conditions and familial circumstances, and the idea was to finding civilian employment in Norway. It was during the train journey that he encountered **Osborn Stolpe**. Both lacked passports and therefore crossed the border illegally, after which they were arrested by the Norwegian authorities and brought to the *SS* recruitment Office in Oslo. **Silfverhjelm**, who did not speak German, later claimed he believed civilian employment would be arranged through the *Waffen-SS*. **Stolpe** was, however, too diminutive for *SS* service.[223]

Alf Dahlberg crossed the border to Norway and enlisted in the *SS* on 19 August. Born in Stockholm in 1919, he was raised by his grandmother. Seeking dismissal during his subsequent military service, he traveled to Finland where he participated in the fighting on the Hanko Front until December 1941. His first contact with the German army was through civilian employment, which he found following his return. Employed by the state railway service, he guarded German trains traveling through Sweden to Norway. He was, however, discharged after being accused of conversing with a German soldier – something which was strictly prohibited. Employment in Sweden proving difficult, he chose therefore to cross the Norwegian frontier in search of civilian work. Harbouring sympathies with the *SSS* party, he signed, as with **Silfverhjelm**, the *SS* contract in the belief that this would open the door to desired civilian employment.[224]

Three more Swedes crossed the border three days after **Dahlberg**. Determined to enter Norway in order to expedite entry into the German armed forces, the trio, which hailed from Stockholm, consisted of three **Bo Wikström** (b.1924), **Patrik Mineur** (b.1918) and **Thord Bergstrand** (b. 1919), were all convinced National Socialists. **Bergstrand** had served in Finland on the Hanko Front. Prior to this, he was suspected in the bombing of a left wing newspaper and also accused of breaking into a synagogue. Returning to Finland in 1942 as a member of a maintenance unit, he meet up with members of the *Waffen-SS,* who bragged about the high pay and other privileges. **Bergstrand**, who left the *SSS* party after four years membership in 1941, still sympathized with the ideology and socialized with party members. Back in Stockholm, rumours of the raising of a Swedish *SS* Battalion inspired him to investigate joining it.[225] **Bergstrand,** as **Wikström** and

221 Telegram from Attache-abteilung im *Generalstab des Heeres* to the Swedish military attaché in Berlin. 29.6.43. (Author's archive)

222 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)

223 Ibid.

224 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)

225 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)

Erik Silfverhjelm. (Author's archive)

Per Hagberg, dressed in his Finnish uniform. (Author's archive)

Lennart Nisseby. (Bosse B. archive)

Members of the "Nordic Youth" during a party meeting. Third man in the front row is Bo Wikström, who joined the *SS* during summer 1942. (Author's archive)

Mineur crossed the border, took an alternative route to meet his friends across the border. **Mineur** had also been a very active party member and came from a National Socialist oriented family. Appointed "team leader" in October 1941, he spent most of his free time working for the party. His chosen political orientation was not always popular or safe in Sweden; this was demonstrated by the fact that he was, at one point, assaulted and kidnapped by a group of communists. Forced into a car, **Mineur** managed to defend himself and force the driver to drop him off at the nearest police station.[226] **Wikström** joined the party in 1941 and quickly became an active member who served in the colour guard, sold the party newspaper and passed out flyers.[227] Attempting to enlist as a volunteer for Finland in spring 1942, he was rejected for being underage. Thus he contemplated joining the German forces instead.[228] Rejected by the *Luftwaffe*, he joined the *SS* instead.[229]

They would be joined by other volunteers. **Kurt Sjögård** (b. 1920) who had no *SSS* party affiliation before applying for membership during his *Waffen-SS* training. **Kjell Persson** (b. 1921) and **Erik Jakobsson** deserted from their army unit to make their way to Finland via Norway. Arriving

226 Article, 'In memory of Patrik Mineur'. (Author's archive)
227 Case compilation P-akt 4402. 13.7.44. P4402. (RA)
228 Ibid.
229 Interrogation of Bo Erik Helmer Wikström 2.5.46. P4402. (RA)

at the latter, they were persuaded by a German officer to join the *SS* with the promise of service on the Finnish front.[230]

Two more Swedes crossed the Norwegian border on 1 September. **Anders** and **Tage Lindborg** were brothers. It would, however, be several more weeks before they were allowed to sign their *SS* service contracts. A third volunteer joined the *Waffen-SS* the following day. **Hans-Caspar Krueger** (b. 1902) left Sweden for Vienna in 1941.[231] There he started a travel agency. A member of *Allgemeine-SS* from December 1941, he joined the *Waffen-SS* the following year.[232] He subsequently explained his motivations in a somewhat romanticized journal article: "No one could say that we came because of the adventure – no, there is a sense of duty, a sense of decency".[233] Not surprisingly, he had been a member of the *NSAP* party, before it changed its name to *SSS* in 1938. More surprising is the political beliefs of the **Lindborg** brothers who had been communists! Both were imprisoned at a Norwegian internment camp for three weeks before being granted permission to join the *SS*.[234]

Erik Harald Jonsson joined the *SS* in November 1942. He later claimed that the recruitment of **Wikström, Bergstrand** and **Mineur** had been organized by *SSS* party instructor **Bengt Hassler**.[235] **Jonsson** had, following his border crossing, been presented to spy **Thorvald Calais**, who asked if he had been recruited by **Hassler**. **Calais** complained the dearth of Swedish recruits was the result of **Hassler's** cowardice.[236] **Jonsson** recruited himself for political reasons, something that would drastically change during his *SS* service.[237]

Stig Rönnerblad (b. 1923), the last Swede recruited during this period to be mentioned, crossed the Norwegian border on 11 November 1942. Having previously applied for employment with the London Fire Brigade, travel to the United Kingdom proved impossible. His application to the German frontline fire service would only be granted following *SS* service, hence the hapless Swede's enlistment at the Oslo recruiting office.[238]

Training: fall 1942

A significant rift would develop amongst the new Swedish volunteers; two groups emerged: those who were convinced National Socialists and eventually reached the Klagenfurt camp, and those who did not. Those joining the *SS* in 1942 started their training at different times as they enlisted at various dates. Several would meet and train together for longer or shorter periods. Some actually served at the front together. **Sten Eriksson** and **Alf Dahlberg** was sent to Sennheim first. In early September, **Hans-Caspar Krueger** who **Silfverhjelm** described as a "National Socialist out into the fingertips", arrived. A photo portrait of **Krueger** was displayed at the camp canteen bore the description "pure Nordic type".[239] In addition to the above-mentioned volunteers, according to **Silfverhjelm**, **Bo Wikström**, **Patrik Mineur** and **Thord Bergstrand** underwent training there

230 Document concerning Persson, Kjell Esbjörn. 1.12.44. (MUST)
231 *SS*-Stammkarte Hans-Caspar Krueger. (Author's archive)
232 Ibid.
233 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 18.9.43. (KB)
234 Summary of case Hd. 140/43. 11.12.43. P4702. (RA)
235 SD: *Sicherheitsdienst*. Jonsson's testimony about the recruitment from: Kort sammandrag till P.3285. (RA)
236 Short summary to P.3285. (RA)
237 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the German *Waffen-SS*. (MUST)
238 P.M. concerning Stig Anders Rönnerblad. 14.12.43. P5649. (RA)
239 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)

A photo published in the Swedish national socialist press, showing Swedish volunteers in training during 1942. (KB)

at the same time.[240] Also present were **Persson** and **Jakobsson.**[241] The pre-military training was, according to **Dahlberg**, very rigorous. Conversely, **Mineur** recollected three weeks of light training before they entrained for heavier infantry training at Klagenfurt.[242] **Silfverhjelm** was ordered to visit the dentist. This resulted in the extraction of several teeth which he felt could have been saved.[243]

The volunteers were sent to Klagenfurt to be absorbed by *SS-Infanterie Ersatsz Btl.* '*Westland*' for weapons training in early October. **Silfverhjelm,** however, began to experience an old back injury and was admitted to the camp hospital.[244] **Bergstrand**, as a trained Swedish soldier and Finnish front veteran, was dispatched to the Eastern Front just three weeks later.[245] It is also likely that **Eriksson** – an early *SS* enlistee – left earlier than his compatriots.

Whilst **Wikström,** actively trying to recruit members to the *SSS*, wrote party headquarters in Stockholm for membership forms, recent recruits **Dahlberg** and **Silvferhjelm** began to view their hasty enlistment as a mistake.[246] Upon swearing the oath of allegiance to **Hitler**, the political split emerged when several of the volunteers refused. This put the Swedes in a bad light, but **Krueger** took them under his wing and tirelessly defended them, urging superiors to consider their attitude as courageous and a firm display of character. They finally agreed and the recalcitrant volunteers avoided punishment.[247] The story of their refusal originated with **Sten Eriksson**. Another version was put forward by **Patrik Mineur** in a wartime letter. Three weeks training at Sennheim was followed by six weeks at Klagenfurt. The Swedes remained as a group and excelled in all the competitions and exercises. Indeed, the commanding officer nominated them as the best group in the battalion. As a final recognition, the group had the honour to act as colour guard when the

240 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)
241 Document concerning Persson, Kjell Esbjörn. 1.12.44. (MUST)
242 Letter from Patrik Mineur to unknown comrade. Published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 2.10.43. (KB)
243 Report Thursday, 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)
244 Ibid.
245 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)
246 Letter from Bo Wikström. 30.10.42. (Author's archive)
247 Letter from Sten Eriksson, 7.3.86. (Author's archive)

oath of allegiance was sworn.[248] Support for **Eriksson's** story was corroborated **Jakobsson,** who claimed that he and **Persson's** refusal was followed by discharge and dispatch to Finland where they joined the Swedish Volunteer Company.[249] **Gösta Lindborg** refusal was also followed by the same punishment. He later deserted from Finland due to punishment for spreading communist propaganda.[250] One of who swore the oath was **Dahlberg**, who did so out of fear as it was rumored those who refused would be sent away to an undisclosed location.[251]

The Klagenfurt training, according to **Dahlberg**, ended prematurely due to developments on the Eastern Front. He was sent from there to *'Wiking' Division* in early December. Other volunteers – **Krueger**, **Wikström**, **Mineur**, **Nisseby**, **Sjögård** and **Hagberg** – at Klagenfurt may also have been sent to the front at this time. Whilst the latter would see combat, this was not the case with **Dahlberg**, who came down with pneumonia and was returned to the camp hospital.[252]

Those recruited during November (**Erik Harald Jonsson** and **Anders Rönnerblad**) arrived at Sennheim where they met up with **Tage Lindborg**.[253] **Rönnerblad** felt the training was hard, especially due to the lack of food. The extra rations supplied for participation in boxing matches was not enough and he quickly lost 5 kg. **Jonsson**, a party member and National Socialist, lost faith in the ideology while at Sennheim.[254] This resulted from ill-treatment and a general hostile attitude towards Sweden. The limit was reached when they were heard of the oath of allegiance. This was why **Lindborg** and **Jonsson** began to contemplate an escape to neutral Switzerland. Realizing that they would be unable to return to Sweden, they abandoned their plans.[255]

Rönnerblad and **Jonsson** also refused to take the oath. The former, his desire to serve in the Fire service having been deferred, felt he had been lured into the *SS*. Thus he was discharged and ordered to Norway.[256] He planned, as the train was scheduled to travel through Sweden, to escape before arrival in Oslo. Prior to departure, **Rönnerblad** decided – with the collusion of **Jonsson** – that he would forward a telegram from Sweden claiming that **Jonsson's** guardians had died. This would provide the latter with the opportunity to go on leave and desert. He also brought along a few volunteers' letters from to post in Sweden in order to circumvent German mail censorship.[257] One letter was from former communist **Tage Lindborg** who became disenchanted with its ideology following the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. This correspondence, filled with misspellings and errors, was the last letter home before his disappearance in 1943:

> Sennheim 12/11-42.
>
> Dear Mother,
> I've been allowed to write a few short lines. You understand that I've not had a chance to write, as I am in the *Waffen-SS* in France but, as there is a Swede going home, he is posting the letter in Sweden and this is why I can write what I want. Well, as you can see, I and

248 Letter from Patrik Mineur to unknown comrade. Published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 2.10.43. (KB)
249 Document concerning Persson, Kjell Esbjörn. 1.12.44. (MUST)
250 Case summary Hd. 140/43. 11.12.43. P4702. (RA)
251 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)
252 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)
253 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the German *Waffen-SS* (MUST)
254 Interrogation of Stig Anders Rönnerblad. 22.12.42. P5649. (RA)
255 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the German *Waffen-SS*. (MUST)
256 Interrogation of Stig Anders Rönnerblad. 23.12.42. P5649. (RA
257 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the *Waffen-SS*. (MUST)

Gösta came to Norway but as soon as we came across the border we were captured by the *Gestapo* and taken to Halden Prison where we had to sit for a week. Then we were sent to the Grini concentration camp. You know, which you read about in Handelstidningen[258] where they treated prisoners so badly. Now I know it's true because I have personally seen and experienced it – it was pure hell. You may believe that there one had to go through [a great deal] so I have much to tell but it would take too much paper to write on. Gösta and I will probably return home at some point and then we'll get to talk. Well now on December 13 I will go to a place in Sweden and by then another will be at the front. How are you doing at home? I hope you have enough to manage. Down here we are short on food. You are forced to go hungry most of the time. Well now they shout there is a flying alarm, it's almost every night so you are now so used to it, you can probably hardly read what I write, but you understand that here it is dark so you can hardly see to write. How are Inga and the little ones? I hope they are healthy and well. Yes, I do not know how I can get out of here and home … Klagenfurt, which is a 30 kilometers from Italy after which I go to the front. Well as you know, I and Gösta are no longer together as we have been separated so I have not heard from him for a long time, but the last letter he wrote says he was on his way to Finland. You may believe that one is longing for Sweden where one did not know how good we had it. Here it is pure hell. You dare not do anything because you risk being shot. There are many who have been shot. Yes mother, soon it will be Christmas at home in Sweden, but I will probably never get there for I will probably be at the front, but one I thing I can say is that if I get wounded so that I become disabled I'll shoot myself. You may believe we are unhappy here because there are so few Swedes. It's mostly Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, Flemish Belgian and Swiss. Yes here are all damn nations. I'll stop writing my lines now because we are going out to the bunker to see some flying machines. Yes, I am sending you the warmest and fondest regards from your sons Tage and Gösta, if you have not heard anything from him – Gösta, I mean.

Greetings to Inga, Torsten, children, Lisa, Nisse, Ekström and everyone else at home. I send my warmest greetings to all and a special greeting to you and hope you are healthy and are having a good time.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
Tage & Gösta.

Tage Lindborg was eventually transferred to the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps,* but deserted in Croatia during the fall of 1943. He has been listed as missing ever since.[259] The reason why **Jonsson** also wished to desert was a combination of broken illusions and an open conflict with Swedish camp instructor **Torkel Tillman**. The former was disappointed after a rebuff of an enquiry to learn the German language. Asking **Tillman** for assistance in Swedish, he was scolded and informed that the *SS* spoke German only and nothing else.[260]

Rönnerblad succeeded with his plan, deserting from the train dressed in full *SS* uniform on 22 December during a short stopover at Gothenburg, after which he handed himself over to the police. The letters were mailed, but not **Jonsson's** telegram. Several months would pass before he took matters into his own hands. Until then, still refusing to take the oath, he served as a camp stableman.[261]

258 A Swedish communist organ.
259 Summary of case Hd. 140/43. 11.12.43. P4702. (RA)
260 See Chapter 7 for further information about Torkel Tillman.
261 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)

Jonsson's chance came in early February 1943. ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Kurt Birger Norberg**, who likewise had joined the *SS* in November 1942, claimed to have served at Sennheim simultaneously.[262] Wishing to return home also, he decided to assist **Jonsson** by providing permission to visit Norway. This was, in reality, not a decision he was entitled to make. Nevertheless, **Jonsson** entrained at and the beginning of February 1943. Leaving the train in *SS* uniform while in transit through Sweden, he remained there for the rest of the war.[263] For some reason **Jonsson** deemed it necessary to show his signed permission slip to German consulate personnel who immediately alerted Reich authorities. As a result, **Norberg** was ordered to appear before the *Gestapo,* after which he deserted in March 1943.[264] **Jonsson** never mentioned **Norberg's** involvement and later claimed his permit to travel to Norway was motivated by an claimed inheritance dispute that he needed to take care of. His desertion had effects on other Swedish volunteers. *Hamilton Group* member **Arne Ericsson** had been wounded at the end of 1942. Sent to Norway to convalesce, he encountered the wayward **Jonsson** and related that he also contemplated deserting in a similar fashion.[265] Retrieval of pay in Oslo dissuaded him from doing so until the return journey. **Jonsson's** desertion had become well-known by this time and no Swedes were allowed to travel with train through Sweden. **Ericsson** had to leave Norway by boat.[266]

It is likely, in addition to **Tillman** and **Norberg**, that at least two other volunteers served as Sennheim instructors during this period. **Hans Lindström**, served there from the beginning of 1943 according to a unknown Swedish volunteer.[267] **Sven Rydén,** a member of *Eklöf Group* was employed as a political lecturer. **Per-Sigurd Baecklund**, who had joined the *SS* in November of 1942, was approached by **Rydén**, who made several attempts to recruit him as a spy against Sweden. **Baecklund** declined as he had joined the *SS* to fight and nothing else.[268] The attempts ended when **Baecklund** was sent to Klagenfurt in March of 1943.[269]

Others (**Heino Meyer**, **Ragnar Johansson**, **Arne Ericsson)** having been previously wounded in action, would, following recovery, also served as Klagenfurt instructors at Klagenfurt. While there, **Heino Meyer** met his childhood friend ***SS-Schütze*** **Karl-Martin von Zeipel** in February 1943.[270] **Alf Dahlberg** and **Erik Silfverhjelm** met again at Klagenfurt one month later. Ordered there to recover, they subsequently deserted: "[T]hey could not reconcile themselves with the prevailing German regime, having been duped by not receiving desired civil employment."[271]

To sum up: Approximately eighteen Swedes enlisted with the *SS* during the second half of 1942. Ten would serve at the front; of the remainder, three were granted discharge, five deserted and one disappeared. The rest managed to return home.

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262 See Chapter 10 for further information about *SS-Ostuf.* Kurt Birger Norberg.

263 Norberg file, P3796. (RA)

264 Interview with Kurt Birger Norberg. 27.8.01. (Author's archive)

265 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the *Waffen-SS*. (MUST)

266 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)

267 XII 83/Ä.2237, Hans Lindström. "Rank: Unterscharführer. Assignment: Instructor at Sennheim". 31.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2237. (RA)

268 Interrogation of Per Sigurd Baecklund. 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)

269 Militärverhältnisse nr 30337. (NARA/BDC)

270 Letter abstract from Heino Meyer. 22.9.42. (Bosse B. archive) and information from the State Police 3rd Division, concerning person who applied for allowance to acquire firearms. Dnr. 1519 Vap. I. 1948. 23.8.48. XII83 Ä 2155. (RA)

271 Report Thursday 8 June 1943. P4208. (RA)

SS-Unterscharführer Arne Ericsson. (Bosse B. archive)

INTO THE CAUCASUS: *'WIKING' DIVISION* FALL 1942

What happened at the front whilst the new Swedish volunteers underwent training? **Samuelsson** was treated for jaundice at a military hospital behind the main line. While waiting to return to his unit he met a new Swedish recruit, **Egoth Olofsson** (b.1911), who descended from the same town – Gothenburg – as **Samuelsson** on 14 September.[272] A dental technician, the **Olofsson** had been a member of the *NSAP* from 1933. Having served as a Winter War volunteer, he re-enlisted for the same cause in 1941.[273] An alcoholic, he was suspected of fraud and was detained in Sweden pending investigation prior to being allowed to leave for Finland. Using his passport, he instead crossed into Norway to enlist in the *SS* in January 1942. Hoping to become an *SS* dentist after completing the basic training at Sennheim and Graz, he subsequently served with *'Wiking' Division* for several months from August 1942.[274]

The great Caucasus offensive resumed on 23 September; *'Wiking' Division*, the designated spearhead, pressed north from Mosdok bridgehead with the Grusinische Highway as its main objective. **Elis Höglund** of *6./Rgt.* '*Westland*' was wounded and evacuated to a field hospital that same day. He was promoted to the rank of ***SS-Sturmmann*** during convalescence.[275] **Bengt Rosmark** never returned to the front following his May illness. He returned to Sweden on 14 September 1942. Disillusioned with the National Socialist cause and concerned about his mother's illness, he

272 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
273 Compilation to case Hd. 73/42. P6741. (RA)
274 Report Wednesday 25 April 1945 concerning dental technician Oskar Egoth Olofsson. P6741. (RA)
275 Elis Höglund's Wehrpass. (Author's archive)

requested *SS* discharge. Despite this, he claimed he was still "sort of" a National Socialist.[276] His discharge papers noted the award of Eastern Front Medal and a "good" service rating.[277]

'Wiking' Division had to secure the heavily defended mountain village of Malgobek from where the entire Terek valley could be controlled. The assault, commencing on 27 September, encountered immediate fanatical resistance from an entrenched enemy. *I./Rgt.* '*Nordland*' suffered heavy casualties as their assault ground to a halt at 1500 hours; the advance of *II./Rgt.* '*Nordland*', which attacked south of the valley, made some progress. However, the battalion was ultimately forced to dig in to resume the attack the following day.

The entire army, according to a message to the Division on 28 September, expected *'Wiking'* to have reached Ssagopschin the evening. The task to take the town, situated just south of Malgobek, was given to the reinforced *Regiment* '*Westland*'. Its defences were breached by *SS Panzer Abteilung 5 'Wiking',* which was followed by *I./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. To make matters worse, the Division could not expect any significant air support, as the *VIII. Fliegerkorps* was needed around Stalingrad. Throughout mid-day the southern flank of *Regiment* '*Westland*' was under pressure from heavy counter attacks. *Regiment* '*Nordland*', situated in the middle of the Kurp Valley engaged similar enemy assaults. A defence line was created between the two Regiments before nightfall whilst *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5 'Wiking'* went into reserve behind *'Nordland'*. This proved a fortuitous move when Soviet tanks were detected advancing towards *'Westland's'* northern flank. In order to save the situation, *SS-Pz-Abt 5* "was ordered forward. Clashing at dawn, the savage tank battle resulted in a German victory.

Marcus Ledin, who served in the *7./Rgt. 'Westland',* was shot in the right leg just above knee on 30 September. The wounded Swede, finding it impossible to secure evacuation, remained at the front a further 16 days before – suffering from jaundice and malaria – he was transported to the rear by a tank. Far away from the front, he still faced danger when he was injured by artillery shrapnel on 18 October. Saved at the last minute, he awoke in a military hospital, just one of 19 survivors of the original group of 78 men to which he belonged.[278] It was during his hospital stay that he encountered famous Swedish singer **Zarah Leander** during a stopover to entertain the wounded. Following his recovery, he was assigned to *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps*. The military situation stabilized east of Ssagopschin, after which the *Regiment* '*Nordland*' linked up with *Regiment* '*Westland*'. **Samuelsson** was promoted to *SS-Rottenführer* – a rank he held for the remainder of the war – that same day.

Ssagopschin was in German hands; Malgobek was not. The latter village still presented a serious threat to the *'Wiking'*. *I.* and *II./Rgt. 'Germania*' and a battalion of *SS Artillerie-Regiment 5* arrived on 3 October; the task of capturing the village fell upon them. The attack was scheduled to start on 5 October. *Regiment 'Germania',* supported by elements of the *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 5*, would be followed by *II./Rgt.* '*Nordland*' which had been relieved by *SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 5*. *Regiment* '*Westland*' would remain south of the village as a reserve.

Assault units assembled during the hours before dawn; the attack commenced at 04.30 hours while the town was bombarded by waves of *Stuka* dive bombers. The western parts of the town were cleared by 1400; the remainder was stormed by the *I.* and *II./Rgt* '*Germania*'. An immediate Soviet counter-attack was repelled by *II./Rgt. 'Nordland'*. The German offensive resumed on 6 October.

III./Rgt. 'Germania' in which **Tor Samuelsson** and **Heino Meyer** served, moved through Malgobek on 12 October. Arriving there sometime after the assault, the Battalion was spared from

276 Protocol 8 September 1943. Interrogation of Bengt Rosmark. P2204. (RA).

277 Dienstzeitbescheinigung Bengt Henrik Rosmark. 9.9.42. Oslo. (Author's archive).

278 Recollections of Marcus Ledin, undated. (Author's archive).

Marcus Ledin armed with the standard issue German MG34. (Martin Månsson)

SS-Rottenführer Tor Samuelsson. The ribbon-bar denotes award of the Eastern Front Medal. (Martin Månsson)

the fighting. The advance had to be carried out slowly along minor routes, as the major arteries were visible to the Soviets.[279] **Samuelsson's** company relieved soldiers from the *70. Infanterie-Regiment,* which had participated in the assault on Malgobek, in positions 350 metres from an enemy-occupied height. *III./Rgt. 'Germania'* attempted to storm this position on the 15th; four or five attempts, during which **Samuelsson** acted as mortar loader, were made without result. Heavy fighting reduced his company to half its original strength. Attacks continued the next day, **Samuelsson's** mortar crew seeking cover due under heavy bombardments. Soviet shells rained down on them for hours, although no one was hit. The stolid Swede's luck continued as his food canister, water bottle and belt had been shredded by shrapnel but leaving him unharmed. The height finally secured after further fighting, it was defended against numerous counter-attacks. Finns of *III./Rgt. 'Nordland'* managed to capture Hill 701 that same date after heavy combat. **Samuelsson** subsequently received a light shrapnel wound to the knee, but remained at the front. His squad leader, ***SS-Unterscharführer* Ostman**, was not so lucky, sustaining a throat wound while directing fire.[280] **Heino Meyer** had also been wounded at this time.[281]

Samuelsson was evacuated from the frontline on 27 October. Arriving in Malgobek he was able to shower and shave himself. Returning to the front, he was promoted MG squad leader and ordered to man a forward position that could only be held after dark on 6 November. The night remained calm, but the luckless Swede received a second wound – a serious shrapnel injury to the face – whilst returning to the main line the following morning. Finding it all but impossible to eat or speak, he was evacuated a second time.[282] Another member of the *Hamilton Group* wounded during October 1942 was **Nils Sture Johansson,** who was shot in the chest.[283] Remaining in hospital until March 1943, he was granted leave to Norway. Following this he was sent to NCO school, most probably in Grafenwöhr, where he trained until fall 1943. Promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer*, he was released from service shortly after graduation as his contract had expired.[284] He worked as a civilian in Norway for a short period before returning home in January 1944.[285]

In a article published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* in March 1943, written under the pseudonym "**Olof Örn**" **(Olof Eagle)** an anonymous volunteer related how he had fought in the Caucasus alongside Danish and Swedish fighters:

> Letter from the Caucasus Front:
>
> We are in a village in the western Caucasus. It is a small link in a long chain of defense deep in Russia. It is midnight. I look at the clock waiting impatiently for relief. It's been quiet on my watch all evening, an occasional stray bullet has whistled up over our positions and we have thrown away some in response to Ivan. The usual business ... The weather is hazy now with the night, a drop splashed on the helmet now and then; signs of spring after previous cold and snowstorms. You feel ruffled and sleepy in the night weather. I shook myself, peering over in the direction which the Russians are found. No relaxation of vigilance! By habit you keep a

279 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive).
280 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
281 Heino Meyer letter abstract. 18.10.42. Im Laz. (Bosse B. archive)
282 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
283 Interrogation of Nils Sture Johansson, 2.4.44. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
284 Report Thursday 6 June 1946 concerning Johansson, Nils. XII 83/Ä 2312 (RA), Document from the police in Stockholm, 5.11.55. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
285 Case compilation H.A.459/46, 1.8.46. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)

Nils-Sture Johansson. (Bosse B. archive)

sharp lookout, trying in vain to penetrate the haze and darkness with your eyes. Nothing to see, nothing happens.

Behind me I hear whispers and the sound of infantry boots, which creep up as quietly as possible. "Good, I will get to hide under the blanket for a few hours and forget about the Russians in a while", I thought smugly. Appearing from the ground as if by magic, the new guard stands before me in the pitch darkness. We exchange a few words, I take down my machine gun from the parapet, and he goes into position with his. "Good luck keeping watch," I wish my companion, turn my back on him and begin to tiptoe back through the trench that leads to the waiting bed.

A crash; a flame shoots up into the air in front of our line! It was one of the mines in front of our barbed wire barrier. Such things do not happen without cause. I hurry back to the post from which I just left. We stare into the darkness, eyes filled with tears. It is very quiet again. Damn, in this Egyptian darkness the Russians can arrive and dance a few feet before us until we catch sight of them. Suddenly a whole series of explosions; lights from them momentarily betray dark shadows; as we suspected there in the blockade.

Now the circus starts! Alarm! Flares rush up to the sky and illuminating the entire sector. In their light we open machine gun fire. In moments the first Russian appears and dies. They strolled into our mines and thus warned us. Now we play all over with machine guns and rifles bangs mix with the shell whistles through the air and infantry cannon's muffled noises. Explosions amongst the advancing Russians are followed by screams and moans. We are dealing with a stronger force of enemy troops than encountered the previous night, for they bite back considerably. The Russians think they can come through here; they thought wrong.

Our heavy artillery are setting up and running at full swing. Projectiles are howling over us to spread death and destruction amongst the enemy. The Bolsheviks respond in kind. Now, this

nocturnal serenade peaked. We shoot exclusively with tracer, the bullets breaking shining paths through the darkness and sweeping away everything in its path. The fireworks, in comparison to this, at Skansen [a Stockholm fun park] during the King's anniversary are a mere trifle.

Ivan also shoots for all that he is worth. He is tough as always and, having received reinforcements, vehemently doubles his fire. It's getting hot for us here in the trench. Clay and water rises to high heaven when shells hit the ground. Here and there a sudden jerk from a friend who slowly falls; they've gotten theirs, everywhere splashes from bullets and grenade fragments descend into the mire. From my companion on the left I hear a deep sigh and see him fall, struck in the forehead. Even in the death he tightly clasps his hands on the machine gun, grasping his weapon to the very end. He was a nice boy, a Dane from Aarhus, who thought so much about Sweden and Heidenstam. He died like a true Carolingian!

A new man jumps up and grasps the fallen Dane's machine gun. He swears in Swedish about the Russians and disturbed slumber. It is "Götet," a voluntary Sveaborgsman from Gothenburg, master of hand grenades. Now he shows what he's worth. Grenade after grenade hurls from his powerful fist, and now and then he replies with the machine gun.

Blopp! Blopp! start the anti-tank guns. Red tanks approaching it seems! Two are burning like gigantic torches after a short firefight; by the light of them we see a third tank turning around to retreat back to the Russian lines. Thus the Bolsheviks calm down with their fire. They've probably had enough. It's not so easy to jump on the Swedish guys and Danish *Dränge* [contemporary slang for Danish men] in the *Waffen-SS*.

Just as suddenly as the battle started, it was over. It was short but hot. The darkness is broken no more of the tracer and grenade discharges. Reinforced guards remain in position, but the rest of us, still breathless and anxious after the heated battle with Ivan, find our beds. You pull the blanket over your head, and soon we are fast asleep, forgetting the nocturnal episode. Most powerful of all snorers is Jeppe, fishmonger from Copenhagen, who did not want to see the "Red Master" on the town hall square in the King's village and therefore has come to counter "him at the gate". We will succeed with him.

In a few hours it will be the music of war again. Until then we sleep, deep and dreamless. Front soldiers ...

'Wiking' Division was renamed *5. SS Panzer Grenadier Division 'Wiking'* from 9 November 1942. The Terek front was in danger and *III. Panzer-Korps* hard pressed by the middle of that month. Thus *'Wiking' Division* was released and set out on a foot march towards Alagir in support. *II./Rgt. 'Nordland',* reinforced *SS-Pz.Abt 5* and *III./Artillerie-Rgt. 5* reached Alagir from where it launched an immediate counter-attack to assist the beleaguered *13. Panzer Division* encircled north of Gisele. The Soviets, caught by surprise, were unable to prevent the latter from breaking out of the encirclement. A new front, held by *23. Panzer Division*, *'Wiking' Division* and *13. Panzer Division,* was then established between Fiagdon and Ardon. The *23. Panzer Division* was redeployed following the encirclement of *6. Armee* at Stalingrad; *13.Panzer Division* and the *'Wiking' Division* remained to hold the front.

Samuelsson had by then reached *SS-Kriegslazarett 5* in Kislowodosk where he met **Elis Höglund, Arne Ericsson** and **Heino Meyer.**[286] The latter subsequently returned to Sweden. **Samuelsson** returned to the Division in 1943. **Ericsson** would also return after a short period of leave.[287]

286 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)

287 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)

Overview

The German summer offensive started on 21 July 1942 was initially a great success, Rostov was recaptured, and the invaders reached the Caucasus. However, the offensive came to an end and the *Wehrmacht* was forced to go onto the defensive. At least nine Swedes underwent their baptism of fire during this time; two more arrived during the summer. By the late fall however, two – **Bengt Olsson** and **Erik Dahlin** were killed in action. **Karl-Erik Nilsson**, **Arne Ericsson, Tor Samuelsson** and **Nils Sture Johansson** of *Hamilton-Group* were wounded. Only **Sten Olsson** and **Ragnar Johansson I** were left as 1942 closed. **Heino Meyer**, **Elis Höglund** and **Marcus Ledin** were likewise wounded in action. Of the three, only **Höglund** returned after recovery.

The Soviets tried to break through the positions of the *13. Panzer Division* during the remainder of November. The situation remained calm on *'Wiking's* front but the flanks remained threatened. An assault on Dsuarikau to the south was halted by *I. and II./Rgt. 'Germania'; SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 5* fended off the enemy south of Karman-Dsindshikau in early December.

A number of changes took place in the Division during mid-December. **Felix Steiner** was promoted commander of *III. Panzer-Korps*. Divisional command was passed on to former Regimental commander **Herbert Otto Gille.**

It was, as a result of the increased Soviet attacks on *III. Panzer-Korps*, was decided the front would be shortened on 22 December. The contested Ossetisch Highway was abandoned and all units pulled back to the new defensive line between Durdur and Elchotowo. *'Wiking'* was transported to *4. Panzer-Armee* near Stalingrad a few days later.

As previously mentioned, **Bo Wikström, Per Hagberg, Kurt Sjögård, Lennart Nisseby, Sten Eriksson, Hans-Caspar Krueger, Thord Bergstrand** and **Patrik Mineur** had already been sent to the front. The first five ended up serving together in *6./Rgt. 'Germania'*, whilst **Mineur** and **Bergstrand** were assigned as drivers for a rear echelon unit. It is, however, possible that **Bergstrand** started out, according to his published correspondence in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, as a *front-soldat*. **Wikström**, who served with the machine-gun and mortar section, spent Christmas together with other European volunteers; New Year's Eve was spent asleep on a Russian stove top.[288]

The southern portion of the Eastern Front was in crisis by year's end. *17. Armee* had been halted in the Caucasus, its goal to reach the Black Sea thwarted. The advance through the eastern Caucasus towards Grossny had also failed. Forced to detrain into combat, *'Wiking'* found itself immediately engaged in heavy fighting on reaching Simowniki during the last days of December. Elsewhere, *4. Panzer Armee* was retreating from Kuberle to Rostov whilst the embattled *6. Armee* was encircled at Stalingrad.

5. SS-Panzergrenadier Division 'Wiking' – 1943

Only a handful of Swedish volunteers, several of whom would be killed, wounded or discharged, served with *'Wiking' Division* from 1943. However, at the same time the amount of first hand accounts published in Sweden increased. This is especially due to three volunteers, **Thord Bergstrand**, "**Olof Örn**" and **Hans-Caspar Krueger**. Their articles provide insight into the lives of Swedish combatants, although the subsequent publications do not provide a chronological record of the Division's service. In some cases I have been able to arrange the articles chronologically; in other cases they are presented in order of publication date. Their veracity as wartime propaganda remains open to question.

288 Bo Wikström correspondence, 9.1.43. (Author's archive)

'Wiking' was sent to cover the southern flank of *4. Panzer Armee* in early 1943. The Division made a fighting withdrawal through Gigant, Zelina and Jegorlykskaja towards Rostov in the middle of that month, whilst most of *4. Panzer Armee* withdrew westwards towards Mius and Dnjepnr in order to counter the enemy incursions across the Donets River at Isjum. **Bergstrand** and **Mineur** were serving as munition lorry drivers in *8./Nachschub-Rgt. 5* '*Wiking'* at this time.[289] Not much time was given for sleep, but food and cigarettes were available in quantity. **Ragnar Johansson I,** in contrast with the youthful volunteers, served in a rear echelon unit of *Regiment* '*Westland*' before transfer to *Regiment* '*Germania*' as a *frontsoldat* during late 1942/early 1943. Having luckily survived subsequent fighting, he was sent to Klagenfurt camp.[290]

The retreating *4. Armee* participated in a failed relief attempt to relieve the doomed Stalingrad "*Kessel*", which by now had capitulated. This disaster was an undisputed fact; **Stalin** and the Soviet high command made the most of the situation. *Heeresgruppe* "*Süd*" managed to stall subsequent enemy advances and recaptured Kharkov. A new line of defence was established at the Donetz sector, to which the *1. Panzer-Armee* including *5. SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Wiking'* was deployed.

Sten Eriksson's time with *6./SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 9* '*Germania*' was brief. **Hagberg, Sjögård, Nisseby** and **Wikström** served together in the same company. They had, according to the latter, been guarding a lakeside village with **Eriksson** when probing Soviet infantry appeared; reporting back to the main body of the unit, **Eriksson** suffered from frostbite during this affair. He would spend eight months at a hospital before evacuation to Finland in October 1943.[291] It was during his convalescence that he received a letter from a Swedish friend interested in joining up. Eriksson responded by advising the correspondent to leave without permission and acknowledging that "the Swastika means as much to me as to you".[292]

Elis Höglund also appears to have returned to *6./Rgt.* '*Westland*' at the same time while another member of the '*Hamilton Group*' – **Sten** "**Stesse**" **Olsson –** suffered a throat wound whilst serving in *Rgt.* '*Germania*'.[293] He was, following recovery and depot service at Klagenfurt, allowed to visit Norway on leave after which he requested permission to visit relatives in Sweden. The request having been denied, his fiancée joined him in Norway where she encouraged him to desert. Informing the local German commander that he wanted to travel to the border in order to converse with someone in his native tongue, he crossed the Swedish frontier in his *SS*-uniform.[294] German consular official **Friedrich Stengel** asked **Olsson's** brother to convey greetings to "**Stesse**" whom he hoped would visit to say hello and pick up accumulated *SS* pay. Swedish authorities suspected this was a ploy to discover the deserter's whereabouts.[295]

More Swedish volunteers, belonging to *Regiment* '*Westland's*' replacement battalion, arrived at Klagenfurt in spring 1943.[296] The four Swedes serving together in *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*' were at

289 Report Wednesday, 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST) and list from Deutsche Diensstelle (WASt), Berlin, 30.8.78. (Author's archive)

290 P.M. concerning metal worker Nils Ragnar Johansson 27.2.47 (based on 13.2.47 interrogation.) XII 83/Ä 632. (RA)

291 Testimony of *SS-Sturmmann* Bo Wikström and *SS-Unterscharführer* Sten Eriksson to Martin Månsson. (Unknown date)

292 Letter from A. Johansson to *SS-Schütze* Sten Eriksson 7.7.43. Hd. 1209/41. (RA)

293 Letter to Landsfogden S. Wannstedt, Länsstyrelsen – Stockholm from Stockholm Police. 7.8.43. P3959. (RA)

294 Report after Interrogation of Sten Gustaf Olsson, 1.5.43. P3959. (RA)

295 P.M. to case Hd. 633/43. 22.5.43. P3959. (RA)

296 Most would never serve with *'Wiking' Division.* See Chapter 6 for their subsequent service with *'Nordland' Division*.

Ragnar Johansson I.
(Author's archive)

The young Sten Eriksson, who served in *6./Rgt. 'Germania'*. (Bosse B. archive)

Elis Höglund. (Author's archive)

one point ordered on sentry duty near a frozen lake together with two Netherlands volunteers. **Wikström** described the incident in a *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* feature article:

> At one point we had a really funny incident with Hagberg. We Swedes, reinforced by two Dutchmen, were sent forward to a small lake to watch for the Russians heading our way. Occurring during the retreat this winter, they were expected the next day. Close to our post was a small village. Early that morning, Hagberg left to 'organize'. A few extra eggs, butter or bread couldn't hurt, and Hagberg was great in that area; this was probably around half past three. At 4 o'clock came Sjögård running and reported that the Russians were only 400 metres away from the village. Nisseby's machine gun was malfunctioning, and there was no other option than to bailout as quick as possible. Hagberg was not found anywhere, and we lost all hope for him. We retreated over the ice, whilst the bullets whistled past us. We had been running for about 200-300 metres across the frozen lake when we saw a hilarious sight. There came Hagberg running for all he was worth out of the village between us and the Russians with a loaf of bread tucked under his arm. The *Unterscharführer* began to swear loudly at Hagberg after reaching safety Hageberg just laughed and neither the *Unterscharführer* nor the rest of us could resist laughing."[297]

This kind of behavior was not uncommon for **Hagberg**, who was described by **Wikström** as one of the calmest soldier he ever met. During attacks, he usually sat upright in vehicles together with

297 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, November 1943. (KB)

Nisseby whilst everyone else took cover; it was after one such incident that their platoon leader remarked: "You Swedes are not ordinary men made out of flesh and blood, but made of steel!"[298]

On 5 February, **Felix Steiner** received a message informing him that he would be in charge of the creation of the new *III. Germanische SS-Panzer-Korps*. Before this occurred, he returned to *'Wiking'* before the move through Amwrosiewka. There it rested before continuing the march towards Stalino, where a gruesome scenes awaited it soldiers. **Thord Bergstrand** recalled:

> I was involved in the recapture of Stalino from the Russians. They had made a long powerful armoured shock attack and there stood by their petrol-less tanks. They had, however, acted as welcoming committee for the last hospital train from Stalingrad.
>
> It was the most disgusting thing I've ever seen. There was not a living being left on the train. In the snow were German soldiers with amputated legs who had been forced to run on the stumps. This was determined by tracks in the snow. The nurses lay on the ground with smashed heads; forked branches had been run into their genitals.
>
> There was retaliation, as it turned out to be the civilians who had behaved the worst. All, except children, were shot. [299]

Bergstrand, falling ill from jaundice at this time, was evacuated to a military hospital.[300] **Steiner** received a new order two day afterwards – the Division would turn west and attack towards the Krasno-Armaiskoje area. This resulted from a powerful offensive by the Soviet Popov Armoured Group, which had crossed the Donets near Isjum and was steadily advancing to the south. The whole front was in danger. *4. Panzer Armee* had been able to hold the enemy back between Lissitschanska and Kramatorskaja, but was unable to throw them back. *'Wiking' Division*, assigned to halt the enemy by a flank movement, turned from Stalino on the 10 February. *Rgt.* '*Germania*' led the assault, whilst *Rgt.* '*Nordland*' formed a rear guard. The situation of *Heeresgruppe Süd,* held by the *1.* and *4. Panzer Armee,* was critical; it was crucial that the Popov Group be held at Krasno-Armaiskoje in order to allow the *Heeresgruppe* freedom of action. *4. Panzer-Armee* gathered between Saporosje and Stalino in order to attack northwards. The newly arrived *Armee-Abteilung Kempf* would secure its northern flank as part of a pincer movement to halt the enemy between the Donets and the Dnieper *1. Panzer-Armee* was assigned to engage the enemy at Kramatorskaja, crush the Popov Group and push through Slawjanka towards the Donets at Isjum. The rampaging Soviet armoured group had to be halted by the *'Wiking' Division* if this grand plan was to succeed.

The *'Wiking' Division*, rushing by the Galluzinowka highway, reached Selidowka, which was free of the enemy. *Regiment 'Nordland'* was able to seize the Wosdweschenskij hills unmolested, after which the spearhead captured the tactically important Datschanskij and Hill 180. From the vistas provided, Soviet armoured columns were observed at Gublin. The spearhead's artillery immediately opened fire and the enemy withdrew. At the same time, *Regiment* '*Nordland*' rushed Gublin, capturing the town before it fell to the Soviets. From there they jumped-off to assault further north and dug in on 11 February.

During the night of the 12th, elements of *'Wiking'* moved towards Swerrew and took up positions along the Krasno-Armaiskoje road and railroad towards the south west. The northern and western flank was secured by *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 5*; *Rgt.* '*Westland*' turned sharply to the north in order to reach Lissowka Rownyj and cut-off the artery towards Krasno-Armaiskoje.

298 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, November 1943. (KB)

299 *Expressen*, 6.7.77. (KB)

300 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)

Regiment '*Germania*' advanced from Selidowka to capture Grischino. Both regiments were reinforced by artillery from *SS Artillerie Regiment 5 'Wiking'*.

Soviet armoured units, attempting to break through towards Novo-Ekonomitscheskoje throughout the following day, were halted by *Regiment* '*Westland*'. *Regiment* '*Germania*' commenced their assault on Grischino on the 14th. Capturing the northern part of the village, they went into positions while the battle for Gublin continued. Grischino fell into German hands on 19 February; the assault preparations of the *Heeresgruppe Süd* were well under way. *4. Panzer-Armee* thrust towards whilst *1. Panzer-Armee* engaged with Popov *Group* the next day. *7. Panzer Division*, followed by *'Wiking' Division,* moved towards Dobrapolje. of both divisions assaulted Krasno-Armaiskoje supported by *SS Panzer Abteilung 5*. All opposition crushed, the Soviets retreated northward while '*Germania*' and '*Nordland*' Regiments annihilated a Soviet ski-brigade.

The threat to the southern front had been averted. *'Wiking' Division*, in pursuit of the retreating enemy, reached the Byk sector on 22 February without encountering resistance. The advance could now continue through Novo-Petrowka, Ssamara and into Alexandrowka. **Wikström** remembered the fierce battle that followed:

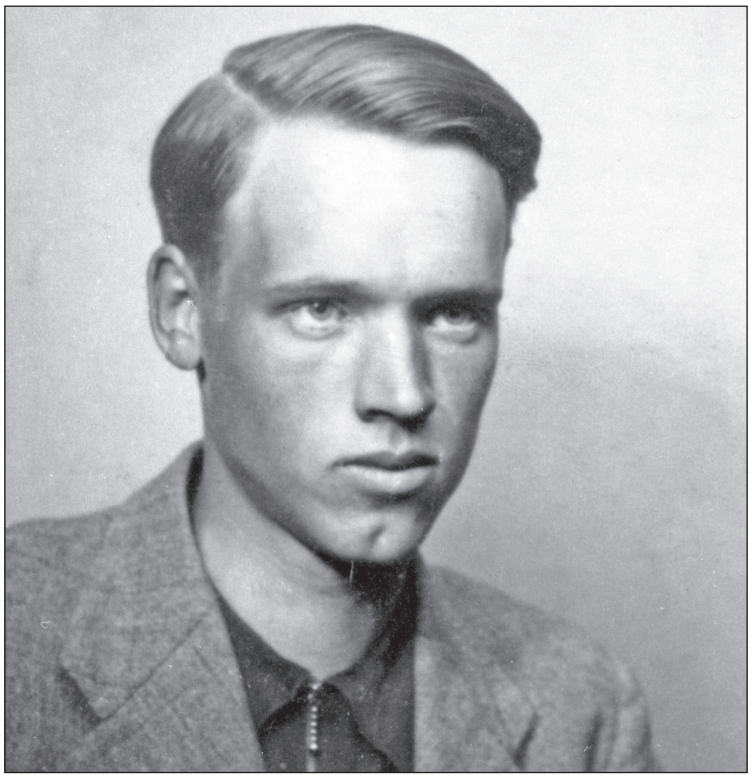
> In the spring our Company participated in a push against Alexandrowsk. My group moved forward to observe the effects of the artillery. As we lay in the field next to a barn – or perhaps a school – there is no great difference between a barn and a school in the Soviet Union, we received mortar fire. As we pushed on, we received anti-tank fire from the town; the entire Battalion arrived around mid-day. During the assault our group managed to capture an intact enemy tank, the crew having been neutralized. Fuel and supplies came with it so, having brought up a company driver, we rode around the city with a Swastika flag draped over it. Nisseby came along for the ride, which ended when the company commander observed our jolly bunch and ordered us to handover our ride to the Division staff. The city was overflowing with Russian equipment, guns and mortars; the enemy retreated over the heights behind the town ...[301]

While advancing through the village of Bogdanowka on the 24th the enemy was once again encountered. The *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*', which had advanced westwards, was caught by surprise and overrun by enemy armour and suffered heavy casualties. They managed to withdraw under heavy fighting towards the village with the enemy in close pursuit. There the enemy was meet with heavy artillery fire and retreated northwards.

The assault towards Suchoj-Torez was resumed when *Regiment* '*Germania*', turning northeast in order to turn the enemy flank, united with *7. Panzer Division.* At the same time, *Regiment* '*Westland*' turned towards Zyglerowka; both Regiments were halted by fierce enemy resistance. *Regiment* '*Nordland*' was ordered to cross the river at Ssemenowka and thrust into the enemy along the north bank from the west. The assault was a success, and the Regiment drove deep into the enemy flank at Suchoj-Torez. This allowed the other regiments to cross the river in close pursuit. The southern bank of the Donets was reached and the Division went into defensive positions the following day. Thus the military situation was stabilised albeit with heavy losses. The first of four Swedes in *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*' to be killed was ***SS-Panzergrenadier* Kurt Sjögård**:

> One of the hotter engagements was at Keresino, where Sjögård was wounded. He participated in a in a machine-gun squad patrol towards the village. The squad went into position behind

301 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 13.11.43. (KB)



Curt Sjögård: the first Swede in *6./Rgt. 'Germania'* to fall in action.
(Bosse B. archive)

a haystack before Russian tanks opened up. Sjögård's squad leader and company commander was killed and he sustained wounds which later caused his death in hospital.

The whole company, recognizing the patrol was undergoing hell, was ordered to make a reinforced shock patrol. We fought our way through the entire town. On its streets I saw for the first time fallen German soldiers. They were completely naked. The Russians had looted the bodies of everything and badly mutilated them. It was a horrible sight. Having advanced to the town outskirts, an entire group of Russians tanks suddenly appeared and forced us to rush into nearby houses for cover. With Stuka support, we managed to slowly retire house to house to our jumping off point without great loss.[302]

Sjögård sustained shrapnel wounds to the abdomen and the leg. His leg was amputated at a field hospital. Despite this, and several blood transfusions, it was impossible to save his life. On 22 April he died. He was buried in a German field cemetery five days later.[303]

Thord Bergstrand, who served with the Division from late fall 1942, recollected life at the front in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* under the pseudonym "*Röde Orm*" *(*Red Snake), an old Viking sobriquet:

302 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 1943. (KB)

303 Telegram from *Attache-Abteilung im Generalstab des Heeres* to Swedish military attaché 29.6.43. (Author's archive)

Mud and rain! Bottomless sludge on the roads and rainfall, which really deserves to be described as torrential; the boys swear and curse the weather, which is to us, so familiar during the previous year. We hear, nonetheless, an undertone of triumph in the cursing because mud and the rain is sure sign of spring herald and a herald to the next big offensive. It's probably hard for you at home to understand how it feels to retreat during winter and how angry we Swedish guys were to give up much of what was captured during last summer's big offensive. We have thought of the words "and one against ten were teased by Vasason" but in this case, I think, that even our old Carolingians would have lost the craving. But this is needed for husbanding troops and material for the coming offensive. But do not think we have pulled back without a fight. We have fought like devils, but what good is that when ten new tanks will be storming against us for each we shoot to flames; when every gunned down red assault wave is followed by ten more.

We have retreated past places reminiscent of last summer's fighting, when we went forward and the Bolsheviks ran backwards. Unlike our retreat, which has been well-led, the Russians fled head over heels and delivered to us all their heavy weapons free of charge. As soon as the commissars had fled from the battle lines, we had deserters aplenty. The civilian population, which since last summer has begun to live free, follow and pray to all their saints for an early summer, the saints appear to be in a good mood for spring which, I said, is well underway.

Now these days of retreat are over. We spit on our hands and make frequent counterattacks. Up Kharkov way are other *Waffen-SS* units in full swing. Events will proceed just fine there. The "Bolshies" are apparently surprised by our attacks, because everywhere we take lots of valuable materials. They must think we are as exhausted as they are.

The other day, our Company arrived and, having raged a while, recaptured an important height. Ivan fought back quite well, but was groggy by nightfall. Together with two friends, one Sveaborgs man from Skåne and a Dane, I was put in a hedge on the left. It was dark and the rain came down in buckets. We were tired after the fight and sour. We stood there and observed with machine guns ready and hand grenades in range and for security reasons. Nice bundle charges were close if the Russians even thought about showing up with one or more tanks.

I had just started a lively argument with the comrade from Skåne about the Norrköping Comrades' prospects in the national league spring season, when suddenly a gun is fired behind us. We thought it was our relief, which stumbled, but swear words that came afterwards were pure and unadulterated Russian. We see shadows wandering here and there a short distance from us and opens up with machine guns and gets an immediate response. That's about thirty, and we seem to have found the right place with our ambushes, because of all the screams and moaning sounds.

We shoot and toss grenades as fast as we can, and a comrade who becomes easily offended and outraged, grabbed a charge and threw it in the direction where most of the screams originated. One hell of a bang and a new racket! Apparently a quarrel between the Ivans; an officer or *Politruk*, shouting over the others tried to get the enemy to come and see how we are doing but they just answer back. The Dane comes up with the wild plan to exploit the confusion and make a rush. Said and done! Loaded with hand grenades and a new magazine thrust into weapons, we rush forward, howling like a hundred Indians and with the firepower of a platoon. It was a bit too much for the political commissar's nerves. Whining, swearing, running and stumbling steps make it clear to us that those Tartars have had enough and realized the hopelessness in trying to haunt the nights of Scandinavian guys who already know Ivan, both in Finland and here in Russia.

We remained in position all night because Ivan was trying to create some further devilry in several places. In the morning we went up to see what had left behind. We found ten dead,

five wounded and seven unharmed and healthy brown-bearded types, who raised their hands when we appeared.

They had played dead to avoid having to return to the "glorious Red Army". They were quite finished, poor fellows, after the night's experience. Decent peasant men who foolishly stayed in their villages after following our retreat they had immediately been forced into a Tartar regiment. Their beards trembled and the men cried with joy to be in "njemetski" again. The surviving Tatars hurriedly fled after our little shooting party. Equipment and weapons were left behind. There were machine guns, automatic rifles and ground sheets.

Yes, as I've said, spring is here and we polish our "gats" with special care in preparation for the coming offensive. In conclusion, a greeting to the guys in the Sveaborg, who carry on the fight at home. Make sure that *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* continues to arrive. It gives us a whiff of the good camaraderie and fighting passion in the *SSS*. It would be nice to get so we can read more about the guys on the Svir Front.

Hell Lindholm!

Another **Bergstrand** article was published on 24 April. In it he claimed to have participated in the recapture of Kharkov, which was impossible partly because his Division was situated on a flank south of the city and partly because **Bergstrand** was recovering at a hospital when it was retaken on 15 March. He returned to *'Wiking'* on 11 April.[304]

Defensive positions were held until 16 April after which the Division moved to the Losowaja-Michailowka area for refitting. During this period the '*Nordland*'*-Regiment* was detached to join the newly formed *'Nordland' Division*; the Finnish volunteers of *III./Rgt. 'Nordland*' returned home. An Estonian battalion was attached to the *Westland-Regiment* as a substitute. **Herbert Otto Gille** once again assumed command of the Division after **Steiner's** departure.

Egoth Olofsson who had served with the division since August 1942, left in April 1943, after sustaining a shrapnel wound to the foot.[305] Dissatisfied with *SS* service experience, he subsequently related his disenchantment to his police interrogators:

Moreover, he could not sympathize with *Waffen-SS* comrades who were often so brutal towards civilians and especially against women, who in Russia had been frequently raped by the *SS* men. The Russians, however, were no better against the German soldiers, Russians often mutilating living *SS* men. Olofsson had, during the retreat from the Caucusus, come to a place where *Waffen-SS* prisoners were liberated from the Russians. At the railway station was a German Red Cross train; all the transported soldiers had been murdered and the nurses mutilated in the most vile way, their eyes had been gouged out and their breasts slashed."[306]

The gruesome event was more than likely the same witnessed by **Thord Bergstrand** at Stalino. **Olofsson** was promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer* during his recovery. Accepted at the *SS* dental school, he commenced coursework in December 1943 after which he was promoted to *SS Hauptsturmführer* before commencing practice in Munich.[307] Deserting back to Sweden in spring

304 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)

305 Additional report, Thursday 14 June 1945 P6741. (RA)

306 Report, Wednesday 25 April 1945 concerning dental technician Oskar Egoth Olofsson. P6741. (RA)

307 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen, dentist Oscar Egoth Olofsson, born on 11 January 1911. 6.2.48. P6741. (RA)

1945,[308] whether or not he became a skilled practitioner in his chosen profession is questionable when one considers he was subsequently fined for mistreating a patient so badly that that a colleague stated it was the worst work he had ever seen.[309]

Patrik Mineur continued as a munitions driver in **Bergstrand's** absence. Luck appeared to be with him when men traveling in his truck were wounded by shellfire while he remained unharmed.[310] His luck ran out when he fell ill shortly before the Battle of Kharkov. Evacuated to a field hospital at Sigmaringen, he was granted thirty-two days of leave in Oslo after recovery. His days there were wonderful with plenty to eat and drink. He was also able to speak with his mother by telephone eleven minutes per day. This made him homesick. Visiting Berlin and Vienna on his way back, he took time to see the sights.[311] His leave over, he returned to Klagenfurt to be equipped and sent back to the front. The need for a camp auto mechanic, a profession that **Mineur** mastered, prevented his dispatch to the front until a replacement arrived. How long this took remains unknown.[312]

The last '*Hamilton Group*' Swedes ended their service with *'Wiking' Division* during 1943. In May, **Sten** "**Stesse**" **Olsson** had already fled across the Norwegian border. **Ragnar Johansson I** and **Arne Ericsson**, together with **Heino Meyer,** were assigned to Klagenfurt where they were posted to train the new recruit. **Johansson** would later serve with *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps*.[313] **Ericsson** was sent back to the front shortly afterwards, was soon either wounded or fell ill. Sent to a Munich sanatorium for six weeks after recovery, he applied for a discharge, which was granted on 22 January 1944.[314]

On 6 June, Swedish national day, a letter concerning the involvement of **Bo Wikström** and **Per Hagberg** in the Battle of Kumischevwacha was sent to *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*:

> It had been attempted to drive the Russians away with ordinary *Wehrmacht* troops, but they had been pushed back over and over again. As always, *SS* troops were deployed to crush the stiff resistance. At three o'clock in the night our battalion went into position about a kilometre from the village. At dawn we started to fight our way towards Kumischewacha across a deep valley, which ran straight up to the village. I still remember that Nisseby and I sang "Vi går över daggstänkta berg" [an old Swedish folksong]. Suddenly there were other things to concern ourselves with than singing. Bursts of Russian machine-gun fire greeted us, but we struggled to the outskirts. Just as my squad leader peeked out from a house, a grenade came and took him away pretty much completely. The company commander, who stood close by, was wounded.
>
> The bitter fight lasted the entire day and as darkness fell, we only managed to advance as far as the stream dividing the village or perhaps town – it's difficult to tell the difference in the Soviet paradise – in two equally large parts. We had to spend the night in the town at the riverbed, whilst Red snipers sat in the windows on the other side creating problems and heavy Russian mortars, the damned "twelves", continued all night long. A patrol from our side investigated under cover of the darkness the depth of the river and discovered a crossing point. There we crossed the next morning, apparently surprising the Russians who gave up

308 Compilation of case Hd. 73/42. P6741. (RA)
309 Newspaper clipping in Olofsson's police folder. P6741. (RA)
310 Letter from Patrik Mineur to unknown comrade, *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 2.10.43. (KB)
311 Abstract: Stormvasen, 10.8.43. (RA)
312 Letter from Patrik Mineur to a unknown comrade, *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 2.10.43. (KB)
313 Letter from Åke Söderberg to Gerhard Stolpen. 31/5 1943. (RA)
314 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)

the fight and abandoned the city. Despite many mines on the riverbed, we managed with reasonably small losses."[315]

Serving in the same Regiment, **Tor Samuelsson,** had visited Berlin after a period of leave in Finland, where he wanted to discover why he had been denied a visit to Sweden. In compensation for this, he was once more granted leave (this time to visit Norway) where he remained until June 1943. Finally, on 23 June, he was back with his old Regiment, but reassigned to *2./Rgt.* '*Germania*'. He was posted within an infantry group, but a previous infection resulted in assignment to light duties. His unit received marching orders from at Kurulka on 29 June. For his part, the debilitated **Samuelsson** was sent to the military hospital in Dnjepropetrovsk to carry out the duties of a handy-man. This lasted until late August when he was granted leave once again, after which he ended up serving with the *SiPo* in Norway.[316]

The first article by ***SS-Schütze*** **Hans Caspar Krueger** was published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* at the beginning of July. The piece, covering recent Easter celebrations and the civil population, did not mention combat operations. Sympathy was expressed for the hapless civilians whose suffering was blamed on communist rule. The horrible fate of the Stalino hospital train was also related.[317] **Bergstrand** related in a subsequent article how he and a fellow countrymen engaged a Soviet tank that opened fire on his machine-gun position. The first round missed, covering him in dirt. His comrade opened fire with his anti-tank rifle, missing the first round. Finally the second round put the vehicle out of action.[318] His friend **Bo Wikström** of *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*', leaving the front for two months in July, would be spared the autumn fighting.[319]

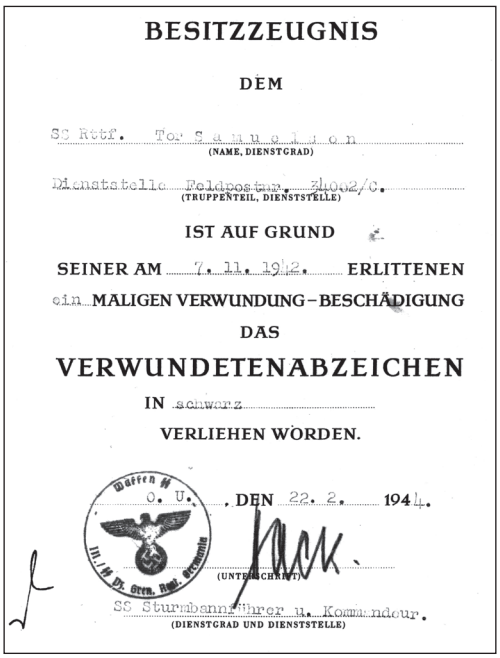
Following the failure of *Operation Zitadelle*, the battle of Kursk in July 1943, *'Wiking' Division* was ordered into position 50 kilometres west of Kharkov. On the 16th the Corps, turning towards Isjum to face an imminent enemy attack, deployed elements of *'Wiking' Division* in an advance towards Aleksejewskoje which it reached the following day. The weather turned and it began to rain. Roads turned into mud; the advance was halted. On the same day the enemy attacked across the Donets west of Isjum and dug in. They also attacked the old *'Wiking'* positions on the Mius before being repelled by *II. SS Panzer Korps*.

Thord Bergstrand informed readers on 17 August how he and his comrades scouted towards an enemy-held village. Close by they found a Soviet artillery piece and captured it complete with its crew. Unable to understand how it worked, they forced the prisoners to turn the gun on the village. In tears, the hapless prisoners bombarded their own forces. The village fell with little resistance not long afterwards.[320]

The Division charged towards Ssredkj on 18 July, which had fallen to the Soviets, to repulse the enemy on the west bank of the Donets The plan was to capture the town and turn towards the north-west to roll up the Soviet bridgehead from the flanks, whilst *I./Rgt 'Westland*' pushed on towards Ssrednj. The assault was a success, but *Kampfgruppe Dorr* of *'Wiking' Division* in action to the northwest was halted. The Division took up positions to the north and northeast of Wjel on 19 July. Estonian volunteers of *Battalion 'Narwa*', dug in on Hill 186.9, were overrun by strong Soviet armoured troops that same day. In close and savage combat they repulsed the enemy that evening.

315 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 1943. (KB)
316 Tor Samuelsson's diary. (Author's archive)
317 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 1943 (KB).
318 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 10.7.43. (KB)
319 Letter from Bo Wikström dated 27.9.43. (KB)
320 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 17.8.43. (KB)

IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS
UND
OBERSTEN BEFEHLSHABERS
DER WEHRMACHT
IST DEM
SS - Rottenführer
Tor S a m u e l s e n , geb. 2.4.192o
AM 3.8.1942
DIE MEDAILLE
WINTERSCHLACHT IM OSTEN
1941/42
(OSTMEDAILLE)
VERLIEHEN WORDEN.
FÜR DIE RICHTIGKEIT:
SS-Obersturmbannführer
u. Stabsführer



BESITZZEUGNIS
DEM
SS Rttf. Tor S a m u e l s o n
(NAME, DIENSTGRAD)
Dienststelle Feldpostnr. 21002/C.
(TRUPPENTEIL, DIENSTSTELLE)
IST AUF GRUND
SEINER AM 7. 11. 1942. ERLITTENEN
ein MALIGEN VERWUNDUNG – BESCHÄDIGUNG
DAS
VERWUNDETENABZEICHEN
IN schwarz
VERLIEHEN WORDEN.
O. U., DEN 22. 2. 1944.
(UNTERSCHRIFT)
SS Sturmbannführer u. Kommandeur.
(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLE)

Tor Samuelsson's award documents.
(Author's archive)

Herved tildeler jeg
Tor Gösta Samuelson
FRONTKJEMPERMERKET
for innsats i kampen mot bolsjevismen.
Oslo, den 27/6 19 44.
Kanellisjef.

It was during **Krueger's** visit to the Ukraine that he met an Estonian volunteer, and together with other volunteers, held a birthday party in honour of the Estonian's 20th birthday.[321]

The day after was referred to in **Höglund's** *Wehrpass* as a "close-combat day", in other words, fighting *sans* armoured support, a jarring experience after returning to the front from hospital.[322]

XIV. Panzer Korps was granted two weeks rest after arriving in Donets. Heavy casualties were, however, still sustained by the Division, ***SS-Rottenführer* Lennart Nisseby's** of *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*' luck running out on the morning of 24 July during a Soviet assault. Shortly after the preparatory artillery fire had ceased, a runner announced the enemy had broken through. The Battalion commander hastily organized a counterattack which he personally led, storming forward whilst shouting "hurrah". With close combat weapons they managed to fend off the enemy, who left behind large quantities of war material. Amongst the defenders' losses was **Nisseby**.[323] His father, concerned after not receiving regular correspondence from his son, wrote the Swedish Foreign Ministry in September 1943, by which time **Nisseby** had been dead for two months.[324] His obituary, published in the local National Socialist journal, stated "You lived as a Soldier – you died as a Soldier".[325] **Sten Eriksson** grieved over the death of his beloved comrade even though they had only served a few weeks together:

> For those of us who came to the war quite green, he was the old Finland warrior, a proper support … He could be slow and reticent, but you always knew where he stood when it mattered. It is difficult to say something that doesn't sounds trivial and commonplace, but I think you understand me if I say he was a genuine Swede and irreplaceable."[326]

Joining the *SS* about the time of **Nisseby's** death, Swedish National Socialist and son of a Colonel, **Göran Stålhammar** from Ekesjö deserted Regiment *K3* sometime between 18-24 July. Making his way across the Norwegian border by boat, he was placed under arrest. His original plan was to enlist with three comrades, but they changed their minds at the last minute. On his person were several military maps which he handed over to the Germans. He was posted to *'Wiking' Division* after basic training.[327]

Severe fighting took place at Golaja-Dolina on 13 August. *XIV. Panzer-Korps,* in an attempt to restore the situation, ordered *Regiment* '*Germania*' to attack the village, which fell into German hands that afternoon. *SS-Pz-Abt 5* and *II./Rgt.* '*Germania*' attacked towards Donets the following day, but the attack was halted. That night *'Wiking' Division* was withdrawn towards Bereka for two days' preparation. By this time the enemy had attacked Kharkov and broke through to the south-west. *SS*-Ddvisions *'Totenkopf'* and '*Das Reich*' having been ordered forward, *'Wiking' Division* had to wait until the roads were clear.

The heavy fighting remained unmentioned in **Krueger's** next article in which he once again showed sympathy for the civilian population and told of meeting an orphan.[328] In another article it

321 *Den Svenske folksocialisten*, 13.11.43. (KB)
322 Elis Höglund's Wehrpass. (Author's archive)
323 Article, 'Nisseby's last fight' by Per Hagberg. (Author's archive)
324 Letter from Lennart Nisseby's father to Swedish authorities. 8.9.43. (Author's archive)
325 Segerrunan – October 1943. (Author's archive)
326 *Den Svenske folksocialisten* 6.11.43. (KB) The article is written by the signature 'St' which may identify the author as Sten Eriksson.
327 Document to "Chefen 1. gfrrgt:tet L17" 17.8.43. (MUST) and document without a name with information about Stålhammar, Clas Göran Hjalmar, f 23/4 22. (MUST)
328 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 4.8.43. (KB)

was described how he and his comrades constructed positions on the Donets front. The men with which he worked were representatives of the German working class and he went on to explain how they helped build the Reich infrastructure they now defended. One of them had recently had his home destroyed by the USAAF.

Finally, on 11 August, *'Wiking' Division* advanced northeast of Kharkov. They were deployed behind the *'Totenkopf'* and *'Das Reich'* divisions whilst the enemy threatened Kharkov from the north. The Division managed to repulse enemy attacks along the Kharkov-Ssumy railroad and established a line of defence stretching from Olschany. The Soviets attacked towards Hill 209.5 – held by the *II./Rgt. 'Germania'* – on 15 August. Driven back, an evening assault was once again repulsed by *SS-Pz-Abt 5 'Wiking'*. The front remained calm until the enemy attacked Hills 228 and 209. It was during subsequent heavy combat that **Hagberg**, the last Swedish fatality in the *6./Rgt. 'Germania',* fell in action. By day's end Hill 209.5 was in enemy hands. **Hagberg**, who had been awarded the Iron Cross Second Class and composed **Nisseby's** obituary, was struck in the lung by a shell fragment. He died ten minutes later.[329] **Wikström**, away from the Company until the beginning of September, did not find out about his friends death until his return. Thus he was the sole surviving Swede in the Company.[330]

The front remained calm until 21 August. The situation for *'Wiking's* neighbouring *3. Panzer Division* was so strained at that it had to pull back to the southwest. *8. Armee* headquarters, as a result of the deteriorating military situation, decided to abandon Kharkov on 22 August in order to avoid encirclement. The looming Soviet threat commenced with an attack on the *Regiment* '*Westland*' the following day. Temporarily halted, it was impossible to retain the positions. Thus the Division withdrew its eastern defence line to Olschany Forest.

The attack, renewed on 31 August, was directed straight towards the Kharkov-Poltava line. **Elis Höglund** recollected the subsequent desperate fighting:

> We were between Kharkov and Poltava. We had dug ourselves into the edge of a wheat field; then came two large tanks. We showered them with our 20 millimeter guns but it was like pouring water on a duck. There was panic and behind me a *Wehrmacht* outpost retired.[331]

The situation was, with the help of *SS-Pz-Abt 5 'Wiking'*, restored and an entire Soviet battalion crushed. The Russians continued to press forward throughout the night and into the morning of 1 September, *Regiment* '*Germania*' receiving a message that the front had been broken in the *23. Panzer Division* sector. A detached company of the Regiment took up ambush positions along the Poltava railroad and held out until *Regiment* '*Der Führer*' of '*Das Reich*' *Division* counter-attacked.

'Wiking' Division was in retreat; followed by a cautious enemy until 6 September, when they took up positions at Walki. There the enemy attacked on the 7th, but were beaten back and the westward retreat continued. The days 3-6 September were noted as "close combat days" for *6./Rgt.* '*Westland*'. **Höglund** related the following during a post-war interview:

> It was around Kharkov on the morning of 3 September that I received shrapnel wounds to the elbow and hip. Fragments smashed the butt of my carbine. At first I thought it wasn't too serious. But then I became stiffer and stiffer. I ended up on a hospital train. Then I realized

329 Article, 'Two more *SSS* men killed on Eastern Front – The Sveaborg men Pelle Hagberg and Kurt Sjögård have given their lives for Sweden during the fighting east of Dnieper'. (Author's archive).

330 Letter from Bo Wikström, 27.9.43. (Author's archive)

331 *Expressen*, 7.7.77. (KB)

SS-Sturmmann Bo Wikström.
(Author's archive)

> that soon it would all be over. They died like flies around me. And the stench; some lost control of their bladder and stomach. They were left lying in it. I had a right arm that worked. With it I fed a young boy who had lost both arms and a leg.[332]

He was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class in October.[333] Abandoning his ideological beliefs, he realised it was not his war any more:

> Well, that disappeared quite quickly when I first heard the Stalin organs. That sound broke down morale. We believed that we came as liberators, but we were occupiers.[334]

Assigned to '*Nordland*' *Division* after his recovery in spring 1944, he never returned to his old division.[335] The situation remained calm until 19 September when the enemy launched the next big offensive towards Chorol and Subny, forcing the Division to make a fighting retreat to Irklejew on the Dnieper. The Soviets tried to achieve surprise with an airborne assault between Cherkassy and Kiev. Although the paratroopers, reinforced by partisans, were repelled by *'Wiking' Division* on the 25th, the enemy still managed to establish a bridgehead on the west bank of the Dnieper. The retreat continued, and on 27 September the Division crossed the Dnieper after six weeks of

332 Ibid.
333 Höglund's Iron Cross documentation. (Author's archive)
334 Ivarsson, p. 126.
335 Elis Höglund's wehrpass. (Author's archive)

combat. The whole front was in flux as *8. Armee* conducted a fighting retreat, attempting to close widening gaps between the units.

Wiking took up positions along the Dnieper in early October. There ***SS-Sturmmann* Bo Wikström**, the sole remaining Swede in in his company since August, unexpectedly met with ***SS-Schütze* Hans-Caspar Krueger**. Delighted by the encounter, he accidentally begun mixing German with Swedish as they spoke. **Wikström** was granted Berlin leave on 25 October. While there he met with his mother who had contacted the Swedish military attaché and managed to have her son released from his contract.[336] It is possible that some help also was provided by ***SS-Obersturmführer* Bengt Hassler** at the *SS-Hauptamt*. In mid-December he was ordered to Prague for discharge and, via Norway, returned home on 13 January 1944.[337] His parents described him as a bit thinner and quite pale, but were happy he was alive. **Hassler** returned a few weeks earlier a, leaving his remaining assignments with the *SSS* party. In a telephone conversation between **Hassler** and **Wikström,** the latter admitted that he contemplated leaving the party as well, but it is remains unknown whether or not he did so.[338] Subsequently fined for illegally crossing the frontier, **Wikström's** *SS* service was over.[339]

From this point onwards the number of Swedish volunteers serving with *'Wiking' Division* was down to a very small number. The following are known to have served during 1944: **Hans-Caspar Krueger, Nils-Edvin Johansson, Thord Bergstrand, Patrik Mineur, Göran Stålhammar** and **Nils Eriksson.** The fact that three would fall in action during the coming months makes it difficult to trace further details in the Swedish archives.

During autumn 1943 *'Wiking' Division* fought on the Dneiper. This was followed by a great attack by 2nd Ukrainian Front on 17 October. At the beginning of November, the Division was reorganised as *SS-Panzer Division 5 'Wiking'* but, as it proved impossible to refresh it, the title was on paper only.

The Red Army attacked near Kiev on 3 November, establishing bridgeheads on both sides of the city. From there they broke the lines of *4. Panzer Armee*, forcing a retreat westwards. Fastow and Shitomir were captured before the enemy offensive was halted by *XXXXVIII. Panzer Korps*. The stalled assault was followed by another breakthrough at Kremenchug on the 24th. Here the enemy created a bridgehead at Cherkassy. The central and northern wing of the *Heeresgruppe* now faced a serious crisis. Shitomir was recaptured in early December and the enemy repulsed at Berdychzow and east of Brusilow. In order to reinforce *'Wiking', Sturmbrigade* '*Wallonien*', consisting of Belgian volunteers once considered racially unfit for *SS* service, were assigned to the Division.

Overview

As with the previous year, 1943 had been incredibly costly for the Swedish volunteers. Many new recruits, who, unlike their predecessors would primarily participate in lengthy retreats, were dispatched to the front in late 1942. However, as in 1942, three volunteers (**Kurt Sjögård, Lennart Nisseby** and **Per Hagberg)** were killed whilst serving with *6./Rgt.* '*Germania*'. Two (**Bo Wikström** and **Sten Eriksson**) who arrived at the front in late 1942 left the Division. Moreover, the last 1942 summer offensive participants (**Sten Olsson**, **Egoth Olofsson** and **Elis Höglund)** were wounded in action whilst **Ragnar Johansson I** either fell ill or was wounded. Both **Arne**

336 Summary of case P-akt 4402. 13.7.44. P4402. (RA)

337 Ibid.

338 Bugged phone abstract of conversation between Bengt Hassler and Wikström's parents, 15/1 1944 and Bengt Hassler and Bo Wikström, 18/1 1944. Hd. 768/42. (RA)

339 Summary of case P-akt 4402. 13.7.44. P4402. (RA)

Ericsson and **Tor Samuelsson**, wounded during fall 1942, rejoined and left *'Wiking' Division* that same year.

1944 – BREAKOUT, REFITTING AND FIGHTING IN POLAND

The front remained, despite the fierce fighting at Cherkassy, relatively calm until Soviet forces launched a surprise attack on 15 January 1944. At first repulsed by the Walloons and *57. Infanterie Division*, a second hostile attack at Kremenchug tore open a gap between Kapitanowka and Rotmistrowka and forced *XI. Armee Korps* to retire.

This led to the creation of the Cherkassy Pocket. It was clear by the evening of 27 January that two enemy armoured columns were behind *'Wiking' Division*. Operating between Smela and Kanew, the pressure increased the following day until, on the 29th, the encirclement was an established fact. Approximately 60,000 men, including *'Wiking'*, were surrounded. Bad weather and tenacious enemy resistance prevented relief columns from approaching and resupply from the air. A sanctioned breakout, approved by **Hitler**, was scheduled to occur at 2300 hours on 16 February.

Whilst several Swedes participating in the fighting around Cherkassy faced inevitable encirclement, this was not the case for ***SS-Rottenführer* Thord Bergstrand.** Having participated in the struggles at Kharkov and Cherkassy in late 1943, he was granted three weeks' leave to Oslo. During this trip he fell ill in Berlin, where he spent one month recovering in a hospital before travelling to his original destination to meet his parents.[340] It was during this time that he became engaged to a Norwegian girl in January 1944. Dispatched to *SS-Pz.-Gren.-Ausb. u. Ers. Bat 5* '*Wiking*' at the Ellwangen training camp in March 1944, he underwent a medical examination which found him unfit for further combat. Thus he remained at camp for several more months.[341]

It appears as if **Hans-Caspar Krueger** had developed into a true propaganda soldier by Christmas 1943 and had been formally transferred to the propaganda unit *SS-Standarte* "*Kurt Eggers*". When party organ *The Swedish People's Socialist* published Christmas greetings from Swedish *SS* soldiers, he no longer signed himself as *SS-Schütze H.C. K.,* but as *SS-Kriegsberichter H.C. K.* He would, however, remain with *'Wiking'* a few months longer. It appears he also served in the pocket and, according to a German officer, refused to fly out in one of the last aircraft leaving the pocket.[342]

It was decided that most of the vehicles would be destroyed and the wounded left behind to an uncertain fate prior to the breakout. The *'Wiking' Division* would act as one of the spearheads as it was one of the strongest formations (11,500 men) within the pocket. The Division was on the move within one half hour of the appointed time and initially met no significant resistance. This proved short-lived. At Dzjurzjentsy the breakout was hampered by difficult terrain and there most of the Division's heavy equipment was destroyed. It turned south in order to avoid probing Soviet armoured columns. The element of surprise was lost soon after sunrise when Soviet attacks increased in ferocity. The Dnieper provided an additional obstacle. Here they hoped to cross a bridge thought to be in Gniloj Tikitj. This was, unfortunately, not the case and hard-pressed German soldiers were forced to throw themselves into the icy water where many drowned, the river made unusually wide by melting snow.

Krueger survived the retreat and was afterwards posted to the *SS-Standarte* '*Kurt Eggers',* even if his time with *'Wiking'* was over, he proudly continued to wear the distinctive black and silver

340 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST).

341 Ibid.

342 The information was provided by a fellow researcher who obtained it from former *SS Obersturmbannführer* Paul Kümmel. Its veracity appears to be unquestionable, as it fits into the time frame of Krueger's war service record.

Hans-Caspar Kreuger (far right) whilst participating in the war correspondent training course. Note he still proudly wears his *'Wiking'* cuff title. (Marc Rikmenspoel)

Göran Stålhammar dressed in his Swedish army uniform. He was serving in *II./ Rgt. 'Germania'* when he disappeared. (Bosse B. archive)

'Wiking' cuff title. ***SS-Panzergrenadier*** **Göran Stålhammar** who served with *Rgt.* '*Germania*', was not so fortunate. Recorded as missing in action, he was most certainly killed during the early hours of 17 February.[343] It has been estimated that approximately 32,000 German soldiers, out of the total of 60,000, managed to escape the pocket, although most lacked all forms of heavy equipment.

'Wiking' Division was withdrawn between Cholm and Lublin for re-fitting after the breakout. This would be, having received no new heavy equipment or replacement personal, something of a wasted effort. Orders to proceed to Kovel – an important rail and road junction on the Polish border – arrived soon afterwards. The remaining *Panzergrenadier* regiments, '*Germania*' and '*Westland*', entrained for Kovel on 16 March, awaited by the Division staff which had already arrived there.

One Swedish volunteer, his officer's training course at Bad Tölz having ended without graduation, made his way to the Division by rail in mid-March 1944 – **Nils Erik Eriksson.** He had crossed the border to Norway two years earlier. Failure to achieve the desired officer rank after losing some vital school documents resulted in the somewhat callow Swede being posted as an NCO and platoon leader to *9./Rgt.* '*Germania*'.

The re-fitting did not go as planned, German forces east of Kovel, coming in contact with the enemy forces three days earlier, retreated to the city outskirts. Transport trains for *'Wiking' Division*, halted by the enemy outside the city, unsuccessfully attempted to bull their way through the enemy encirclement. The Soviet ring was breached by *PzKpw V* "*Panther*" tanks of the *8./SS-Pz-Rgt 5* '*Wiking*' (commanded by **Karl Nicolussi-Leck)**. The noose was, however, tightened again. Thus *LVI. Panzer-Korps* was ordered to launch a relief operation scheduled for 4 April.

The attack commenced at 03.30 hours after a heavy artillery bombardment of Soviet positions. Amongst the units involved was *Panzerkampfgruppe Mühlenkamp* of *SS-Panzer-Regiment 5* '*Wiking*' which trailed behind the spearhead unit; *4. Panzer Division,* and was tasked with the advance towards Kovel. On the flank, *Kampfgruppe Dorr,* with elements of *Rgt.* '*Germania*' attacked towards the north-west part of the city. The first day went slow, after which contact was established with the encircled Kovel garrison. Thousands of wounded were evacuated.

The Soviets were thrown back from the environs of the city over the course of the following days. By 24 April, Kovel was free. For his leadership of the beleaguered garrison, **Herbert Otto Gille,** commander of the *'Wiking' Division,* was awarded the diamonds to his Knight's Cross. Thus he became the first *Waffen-SS* general to receive the embellished decoration. *'Wiking' Division* was to be posted to the Heidelager training area in Poland for refitting after relief. *SS Panzer-Regiment 5* and a battalion of *Rgt.* '*Germania*', remaining at the front, was absorbed by *LVI. Panzer-Korps*. The short period of divisional rest was the time when volunteer **Nils Edvin Johansson** (b. 1925) arrived to start his service within the division. A convicted felon, he fled to Norway at the end of September 1943 to avoid imprisonment. Training at Sennheim, Ellwangen and Graz followed. During his time at the latter camp he was also in action against Balkan partisans, after which he was sent to Poland.[344]

Heeresgruppe Mitte was crushed during the massively successful Soviet offensive known as *Operation Bagration* in June 1944. The Belorussian capital Minsk fell into Russian hands the following month. *4. Armee* and remnants of *9. Armee*, encircled east of the town, were destroyed following another eight days of fighting. OKH, in order to restore the situation, ordered eleven panzer and twenty-five other divisions to close the gap. Among these myriad reinforcements

343 List of Missing from *Pz.Gren.Rgt 9 'Germania'*. DRK. (Author's archive).

344 P.M. concerning the Swedish citizen Nils Edvin Johansson, born on the 8/6 1925 from Stockholm. 18.9.47. (MUST). For more information concerning the deserting Swedes, see the chapter about Swedish volunteers in various combat formations of the *SS*.

were *5. SS Panzer Division 'Wiking'* and *3. SS-Panzer Division 'Totenkopf'*. The general plan was to counter-attack, but an offensive by 1st Ukrainian Front forced the immediate evacuation of Belorussia. *'Wiking' Division* was posted to the Bialystok area in order to counter the new threat despite a hasty and incomplete refitting. ***SS-Rottenführer* Thord Bergstrand**, having been posted as an unwilling draft to a divisional replacement unit, returned to the front about the same time. His resignation, presented during his time at the former, was prompted by imminent contract expiry in September. The request ignored, he was sent back to *'Wiking'* where encountered his old comrade **Patrik Mineur**.[345]

Nils Erik Eriksson, serving with *Rgt.* '*Germania*' since spring 1944, fell in action during the summer. His battalion commander subsequently wrote:

> He [Eriksson] served as commander of a half-track in 9th Company of *SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 9 'Germania'* and was killed in the village of Siedlce (Poland) on July 20 1944 … Eriksson, leading two half-tracks and a gun against the village, broke through the Russian lines and cleared the houses through infantry action. His bravery spared us many losses that day. Unfortunately, he was the only soldier killed by Russian machine gun fire that day.[346]

The exact date of his death however has never been fully established, no combat occurring in the contested village on that day. Perhaps his battalion commander was mistaken or he remembered the date incorrectly. What is clear is that **Eriksson** was killed during summer 1944. Evidence concerning this was subsequently presented to Swedish authorities by his wife. She more than likely obtained this news from the German consulate.[347]

Soviet troops managed to establish a bridgehead over the following days. The plan was that 1st Belorussian Front would expand the position and attack towards Siedlce where the main artery between Brest and Warsaw could be cut. Soviet troops advanced towards the town to tie down the garrison. *'Wiking'* and *Totenkopf* divisions were ordered from Brest southwards. The situation worsened over the following days. By 27 July Brest was cut-off.

The Warsaw uprising began on 1 August. Polish freedom fighters hoped in vain that nearby Soviet troops assist them. The River Bug was crossed by the latter near Slezany on the 2nd. As a result, *'Wiking' Division* withdrew westwards. Meanwhile, the Soviets broke through at Lublin and advanced on Warsaw from the north, their advanced columns reaching the line Okuniew – Radzymin.

Veteran combat leader **Herbert Otto Gille** was promoted to command the newly created *IV. SS Panzer Korps*, including *'Wiking'* and *Totenkopf* together with several *Wehrmacht* formations, in early August. **Johannes-Rudolf Mühlenkamp**, former commander of *SS-Panzer-Rgt. 5 'Wiking'*, assumed command of the Division which was positioned north of Radzymin. The Corps was ordered to establish a new defensive line extending to Praga.

This line was broken on the 18th after a fierce artillery bombardment. Subsequent counter-attacks halted the attackers. Nevertheless, *'Wiking's* western flank, held by *XX. Armee Korps,* was simultaneously broken by the Soviet *8th Army*.

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345 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST).

346 Westberg, Gyllenhaal. p. 257 and letter from *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Paul Kümmel. 5.6.76. (Author's archive).

347 List from the Swedish police of Swedish citizens who during the war served in the *SS* but without having returned. 1.3.46. 50:6 / 4 – A Nazism – 'Svenska nazistiska partier and utlandet. Tyskland. *Waffen-SS* o övrig tysk militärtjänst'. (RA).

War correspondent **Gösta Borg,** who had served with the *'Wiking' Division* during the fall of 1941, rejoined his old Division as a war correspondent by this time. He recalled the savage fighting in the Radzymin sector in his unforgettable memoir *The Red Mass Assault*:

> The Russians pressed hard against the German positions at Radzymin east of Warschawa [Warsaw] during July and August. Two worn out German *Panzergrenadier* divisions fought against thirty Red divisions.
>
> The afternoon is disturbed. In the east, huge dust clouds are growing, brown-yellow masses in the air and on the ground. The Russian contact Infantry is active – battles are raging in several places: a town is under attack. At the Corps staff, the defenders know what to do: the reconnaissance pilots submit their photos, the roads on the enemy side are filled with columns; every forest is filled with masses of armour, infantry and heavy formations. The artillery takes up positions beside the road, gun tube by gun tube and a never-ending stream of vehicles bringing up shells.
>
> A counter-attack commences in order to relieve the pressure on a important position takes place during the night. Prisoners are taken from a new Russian division; deserters claim that the number of divisions is twice of what was assumed. "The road from Bialystok is packed with artillery, guards units and T-34's; a lot of "Josef Stalin" and "Stalin organs".
> The pressure increases during the night: from 2400 hours new artillery batteries start shelling road junctions, artillery positions and command posts. A battalion reports that a nearby field is swarming with crawling Russian Infantry.
>
> Our own soldiers are awake, they are digging and improving, loading MG ammunition, priming hand grenades, stacking shells and *Panzerfausts*, improving camouflage, composing *Feldpost* letters.
>
> 0300 hours. At the Corps command post they are waiting, not yet, not yet... Then a gigantic flame bursts over the eastern horizon, it is as when a forest bends in a storm, a wall of shells rushes to the morning sky. Finally – it has begun. The tension in everybody's face washes away. It has begun – from the foxholes in the front to 10 kilometres behind everything is raged by the firestorm.
>
> The sky is clear, the heat is strong and heavy traffic creates large dust clouds that are constantly renewed. A continuous thunder can be heard on the western side of Modlin; it increases every kilometre, soon the houses are shaking. At the River Bug crossing point the sound constant, it has struck the earth: The sides of the car are shaking; you must speak loud to make yourself heard. Anti-aircraft spit grey-black explosions against the blue sky, it shines aluminium when the target crosses over the wing – the explosion rips in our ears. The sound increases, the riverbank is behind us. The car rushes onwards, passing ammunition transports that alone drive under the fire cupola, meeting others, covered with a thick layer of dust; often a pair of legs can be seen dangling from the edge of them. Ambulances, tanks shot to pieces. Ahead of us – traffic jam, *Feldgendarmerie* – it howls in over us, no, ahead of us, the hand grips the head, the earth moans, trees are cut in two, heat and dust – and already it crashes around us again, into a group of houses to the left.
>
> The long range artillery saturates the terrain with a heavy barrage – on the road a car is on fire, black lumps, a stench of burnt flesh – blood, rags, soot and dust and already flies. The first wounded; bloody bandages, open uniform tunics and day old beards, eyes strangely open – light wounded on their way back.
>
> A whirling, gurgling something – for your life; get next to, under, against, something! – Hold fast! And you know that you are helpless, worth less than nothing – everything is thrown around – the air is blown away and sucked upwards, the village is under fire from a rocket launcher. The car is pinned against a stone wall – smoking human remains are exposed by a passing tank.

> We get up, weak knees, sub-machine guns, hand grenades, mustard yellow figures run toward us, their hands raised, no weapons, short hair, wide open mouths and eyes. Prisoners, sweating, dirty and bloody – several of them fall – the blood runs dark red from the crushed skull. Men, a lot of them just boys, dig for their lives, load, aim, shoot, screaming or crawling away; a lot of them are dead before they hit the ground.[348]

Borg later claimed to have served briefly as an orderly for **Herbert Otto Gille** during this fighting. He was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for his efforts.[349]

Retreating German units managed to create new defensive positions extending from the Bug to Malopole on 24 August. Soviet attacks continued until late August, after which the front remained somewhat calm. This comparative calm lasted until the morning of the 1 September when *'Wiking' Division* was subjected to a heavy preparatory barrage, followed by an enemy attack. *II./Rgt.* '*Westland*' was pressed hard and forced to retire. The attack was eventually forced back, but was followed by another, subsequently repulsed, at 1800 hours. It would not be long before the determined enemy struck again. The anticipated breakthrough occurred the following day, the enemy, on the move again, capturing Borki, which was eventually retaken after a series of costly counter-attacks. Sporadic fighting continued until mid-September. The Soviets had seized Praga (14 September) by then. There they would halt until early October.

The enemy began probing the German defence with daily reconnaissance patrols in late September. The situation proved disastrous for the Polish Home Army. The hoped for Soviet assistance failed to materialise. **Gösta Borg,** who visited *'Wiking' Division* during the Radzymin fighting, witnessed horrible conditions during the doomed uprising. Home Army commander **General Bor** capitulated. **Borg** was present at the incident and documented the event with his camera.[350]

It was clear the Soviets would attempt to storm defences held by *IV. SS Panzer-Korps* in early October. German reconnaissance revealed the enemy's carefully laid plans. The pre-determined start date (9 October) was the same day **Karl Ullrich** was appointed *'Wiking' Division* commander. German artillery bombarded Soviet positions in a considered attempt to delay the impending onslaught. This proved successful, stalling the assault for a short period of time.

The engagement that followed became known as the "Battle of the Wet Triangle". The triangle consisted of the main line of resistance and the Bug and Weichsel Rivers. *III./Rgt.* '*Westland*' was overrun by a seemingly unstoppable enemy, who was, nevertheless, unable to break the main defensive position near Nieporet. Elements of *SS-Panzer-Regiment 5* in co-operation with the *Rgt.* '*Westland*' made several counter-attacks that brought successive enemy attacks to a standstill. **Patrik Mineur** fell in combat that same day. Having hesitated to join the *SS*, he was the last surviving son, both brothers having died on active service with the Swedish and Finnish armies respectively.[351] His mother subsequently wrote:

> I am not worthy to have been given sons who so completely gave their lives for justice and fought against unjust violence. I am grateful to God to have been granted sons who sacrificed their lives against Bolshevism, Nordic Freedom and Sweden's honour.[352]

348 Borg, pp. 20-23.
349 Gösta Borg to Bosse B. (Post-war).
350 See Chapter ??? for Borg's testimony of the fighting in Warsaw fighting.
351 Patrik Mineur obituary. (Author's archive).
352 Journal article, "Patrik Mineur Joins the Silent Chain". (Author's archive).

Gösta Borg at Narwa. (Author's archive)

Patrik Mineur: the last of the Swedish *'Wikings'* to fall in action. (Göran Hargestam)

Fighting continued for several more days, both sides suffering enormous casualties. Serock fell on 21 October. *19. Panzer Division* was thus withdrawn to assist the recapture of the lost town. This unwelcome detraction of strength, significantly decreasing Corps military effectiveness, was succeeded by permission to shorten occupied defensive positions. *'Wiking'* and *Totenkopf* retired over the Brodnowski Canal in late October. The Soviets pushed on towards Nowy Dwor to force the *IV. SS-Pz-Korps* over Weichsel on the 31st. Halted by determined resistance on 1 November, the fighting around Warsaw was all but over for the defenders. Casualties, some of them Swedish, still mounted. **Nils Edvin Johansson** was wounded by shrapnel in mid-December. Evacuated to a Pomeranian hospital in January 1945, his train was ambushed. **Johansson** escaped and made his way to Stettin. Dispatched to Norway from Berlin in early April 1945 with volunteer **Richard af Ström,** he was released from his contract and extradited to Sweden in June 1945.[353] Thus **Thord Bergstrand** became the last remaining Swede with the *'Wiking' Division*.

1944-45: Final Operations

IV. SS-Panzer-Korps was spared the toughest fighting until January 1945. It received word of its deployment to Hungary on Christmas night 1944. Assigned to relieve Budapest where Hungarian, *Wehrmacht* units and *IX. SS Gebirgsjäger Korps,* were trapped. Time was of the essence, so the attack was scheduled to commence the same day *'Wiking'* reached the entrainment area on 1 January. The advance proceeded slowly, the terrain and weather being far from ideal for armoured fighting, with Soviet resistance stiffening every day. The first rescue attempt was called off on 8 January.

Bergstrand requested resignation a second time while serving in Hungary. He later claimed to have refused to participate in combat due to the fact his contract had expired. His parents wrote to the Sweden's Berlin consulate on his behalf. Consular officials contacted ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** to request his assistance. **Eklöf** was outraged and posted a letter to his Company commander accusing **Bergstrand** of cowardice. The latter, in fear of courts martial and summary execution, withdrew his request after being called to account by his superior officer.[354]

Meanwhile, a second relief attempt was in preparation and the Corps was moved to Estergom. The assault – opening on 10 January – was cancelled two days later. **Bergstrand** subsequently wrote:

> It was one of the strangest attacks I ever participated in. We were ordered out in column, one by one after the other, then it was ordered "face right" and then forward. There was a large hedge in front of me. Stepping over it, I plummeted straight down into a pit on to two Russians. Below lay my sub-machine gun ... suddenly I realized the Russians had given up. They threw up their arms ... I was lucky.[355]

His luck ran out a week later. Expending his last three bullets to shoot two Russians and a rabbit, he was hit by shrapnel in the back and leg. The shrapnel in the back was sticking out, and, having removed it, he made his way West to avoid capture. Additional shrapnel was removed after the war.[356]

353 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Nils Edvin Johansson, born on 8/6 1925 from Stockholm. 18.9.47. (MUST).
354 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST).
355 *Expressen*, 6.7.77. (KB).
356 Ibid.

Two comrades who enlisted together: Thord Bergstrand (left) and Bo Wikström (far right). (Månsson-Westberg archive)

Budapest was by then only 21 kilometres away. The last relief attempt commenced two days later but was eventually halted at the end of the month. The encircled garrison was left to its fate. In mid-February some 30,000 men attempted a breakout sortie; only 785 managed to reach German lines.

'Wiking' Division retreated from Hungary westwards. Fearing Soviet retaliation, the goal was to surrender to Anglo-American forces. Retiring into Austria, where it was ordered to disengage and make for US lines to the north, the Division was allowed to go into captivity on their own vehicles in early May. Thus the blood stained Eastern Front service of *'Wiking' Division* ended in anti-climax.

The wounded **Bergstrand** was transported into Austria, his company commander, explaining that the war was over, urged his men to continue the struggle. The disheartened Swede, changing into civilian garb, fled to Munich with a comrade in a horse-drawn cart shortly afterwards. Reporting to the US Army, he was employed at a POW camp as a military policeman after which he returned home with **Frank Gustavsson.** The latter, resigning from the *SS* in 1942, promised to re-enlist if the war favoured a Soviet victory. Thus, in fall 1942 he was drafted and promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer*, after which he served as a training instructor and officer candidate. Assignment to the ill-fated *Nibelungen Division*, the last of the thirty-eight *Waffen-SS* divisions to be organized, followed. It was, however, nothing more than a paper formation and suffered terrible losses. **Gustavsson** fled the doomed Division dressed as a civilian before going into American captivity.[357]

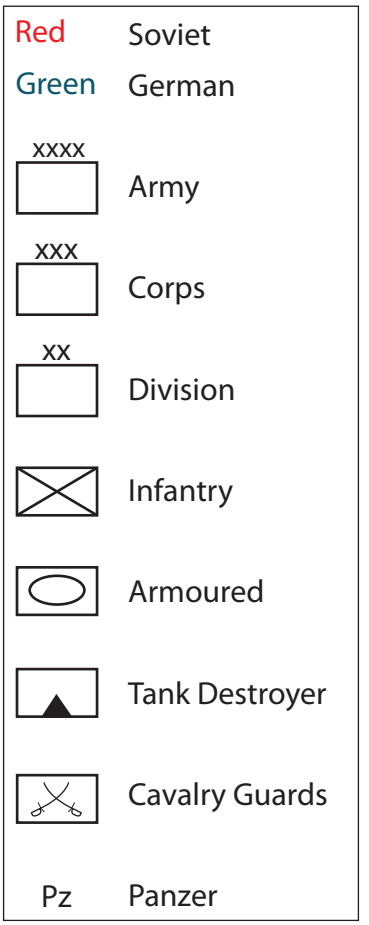
357 Report Wednesday 11 July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Oscar Turesson and Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST).

Frank Gustavsson. (Bosse B. archive)

Summary

'Wiking' Division existed between 1940 and 1945. Transformed from motorized division to a full-strength armoured division, it participated in some of the hardest battles of the Second World War. Its combat record is clearly illustrative of the great "Crusade in the East's" initial spectacular success and the long bloody road terminating with the Third Reich's complete collapse and destruction. It is a common misconception of post-war literature to hold the Division up as an example of a Pre-NATO pan-European division fighting communism. The fact is that throughout its almost five-year service primarily consisted of German personnel. For example, its total complement consisted of approximately 1,500 foreign volunteers and 18,000 ethnic Germans in summer 1941.

'Wiking' Division remains an important topic of study to anyone interested in the Swedish volunteers during 1941-43. From 1943 until the end of the war, the majority served *'Nordland' Division*. Other serving during the same period participated in shorter periods of front line service. However, at least eleven were killed with *'Wiking'*, whilst others suffered wounds or illness connected to the vagaries of active service. Others deserted or were sent home from training camps prior to being sent to the front.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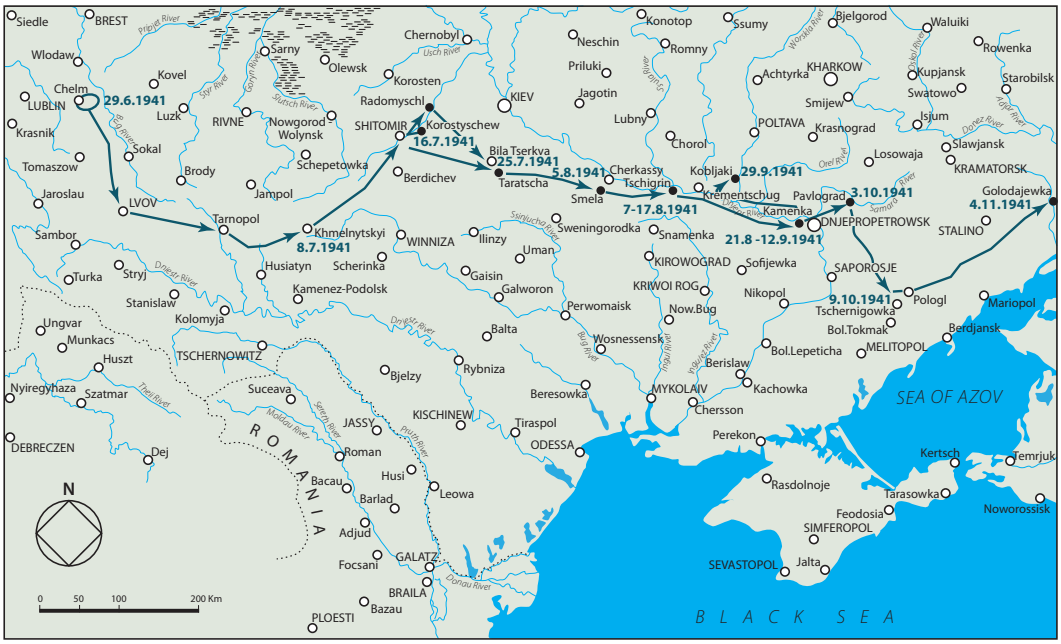
Infantry
Armoured
Tank Destroyer
Cavalry Guards
Pz
Panzer

Map key

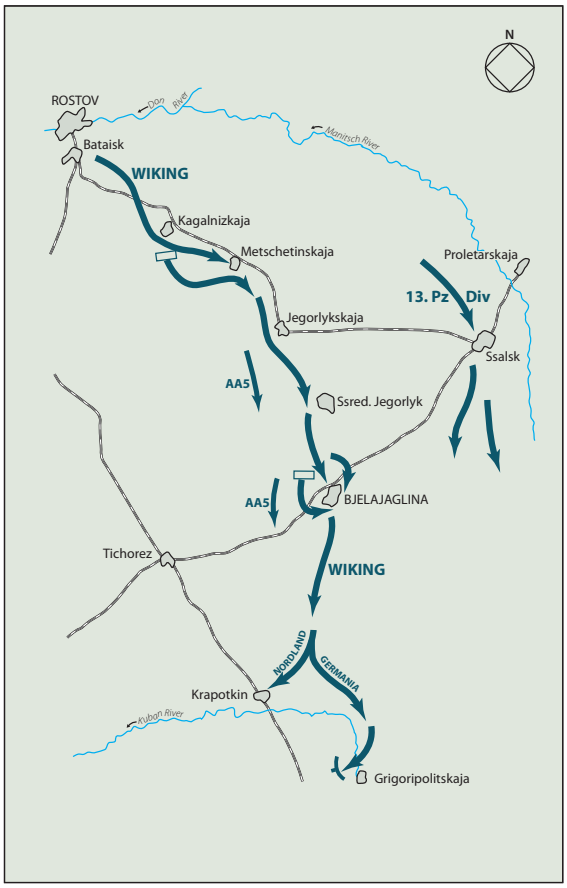
Map 1 Scandinavia.

Map 2 This map of central Europe shows some of the most important training camps for the Swedish volunteers. Sennheim, in occupied France, was a pre-military training camp, where most started their service in the *SS*. This was followed by military training at Klagenfurt (replacement battalion *Westland*), Stralsund (replacement battalion '*Der Führer*') or Graz (where eventually the corps replacement battalion of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was located). Other important training camps were located at Breslau (where combat-experienced Swedes were subject to brief SS infantry training in the summer of 1941), Grafenwöhr (where the *III Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was formed in the summer of 1943), and Bad Tölz (where the *Junkerschule* (officers' school) was situated). Several of the students there visited the concentration camp at Dachau. The Swedish war correspondents of *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* received their training in Berlin.

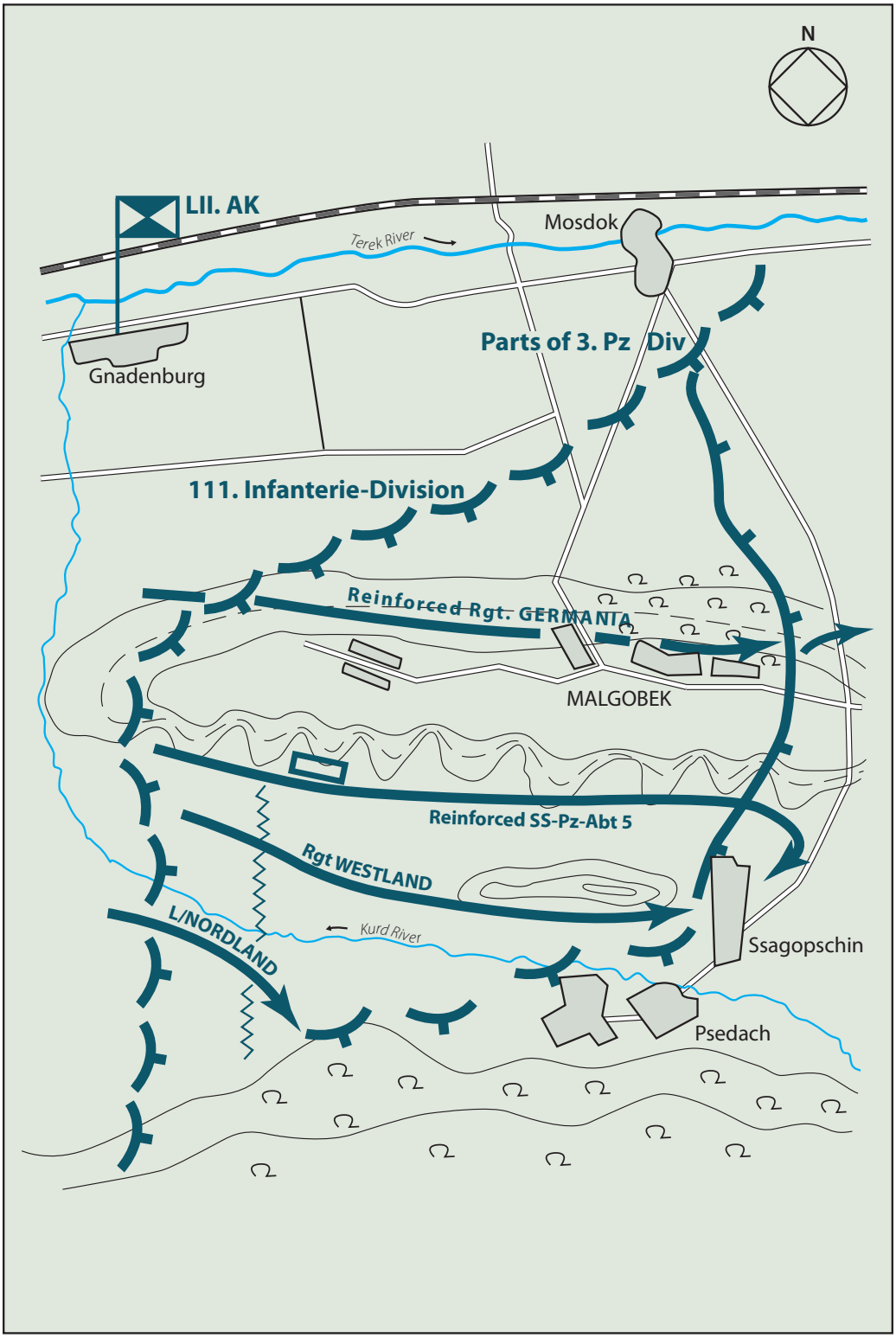
Map 3 The formation of the German army groups at the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union.



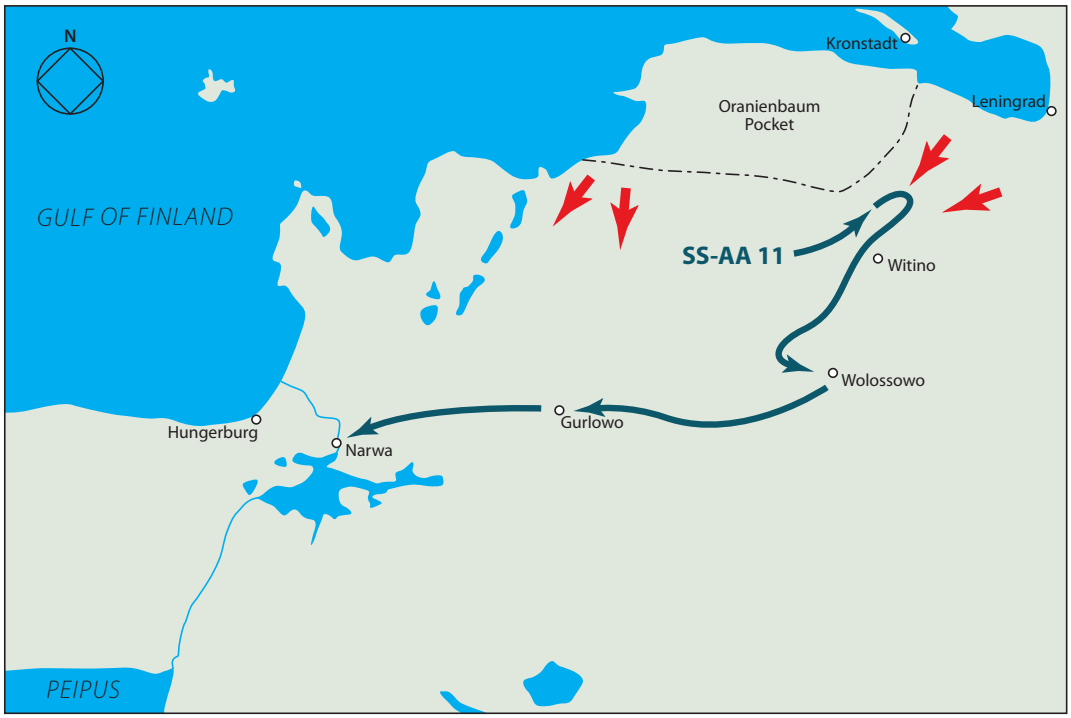
Map 4 The initial advance of the *'Wiking' Division*. June-July 1941.



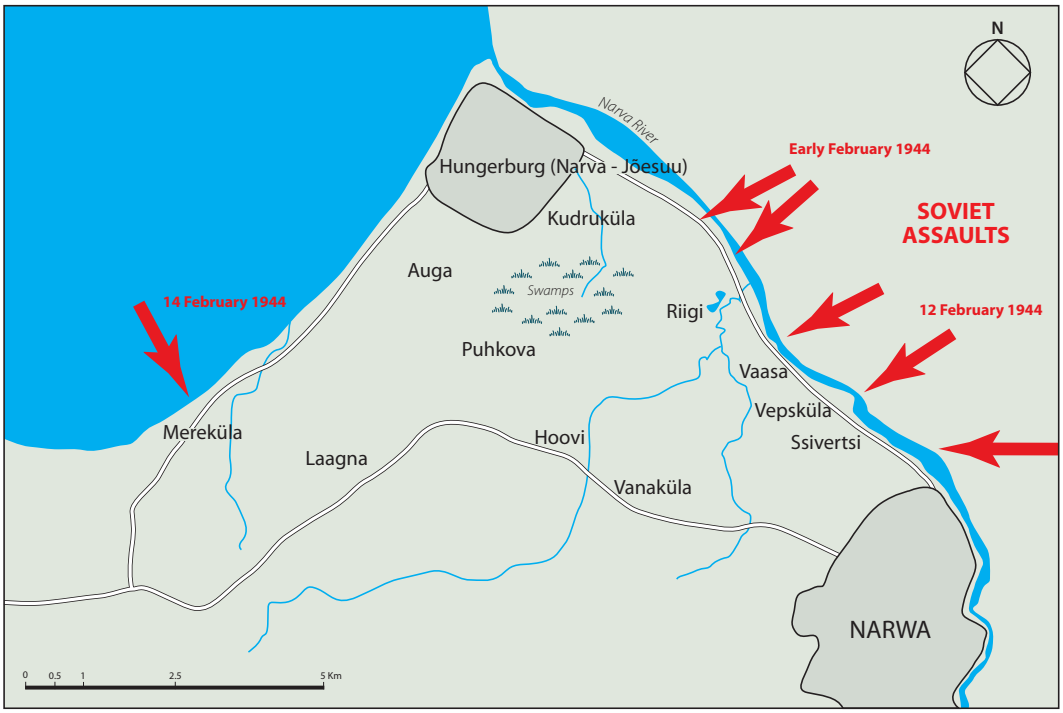
Map 5 The summer offensive of 1942 – the advance from Rostov to Krapotkin.



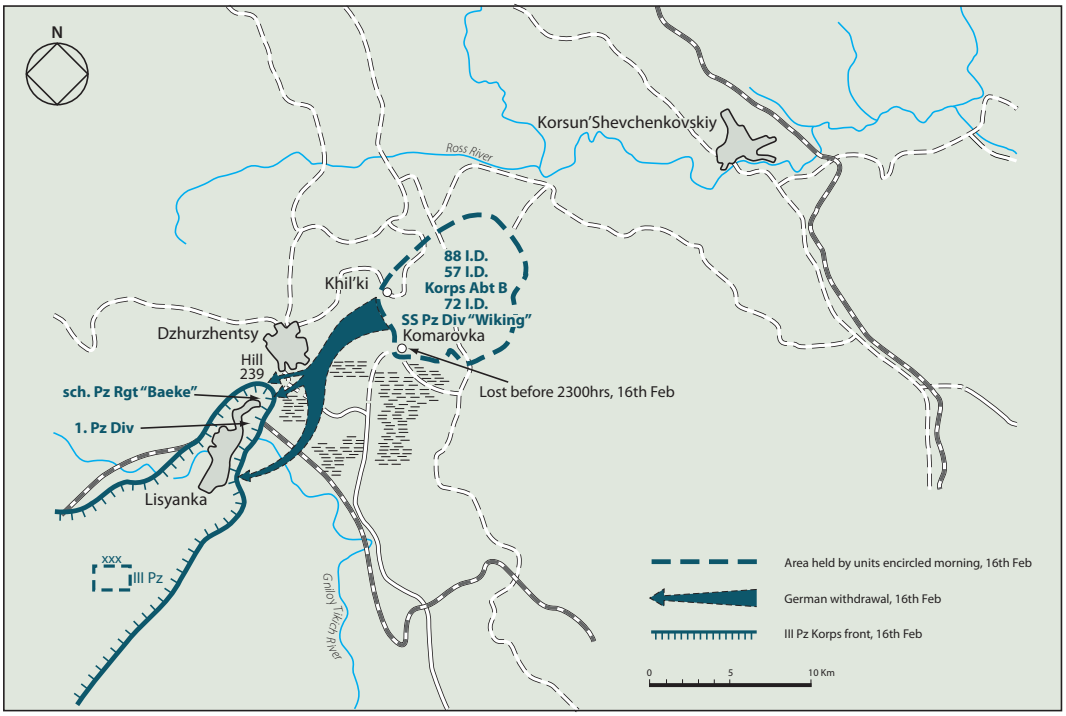
Map 6 The battle of Malgobeck and the Kurp valley, which was fought during October 1942. The assault on the heavily defended village started on the morning of 5 October.



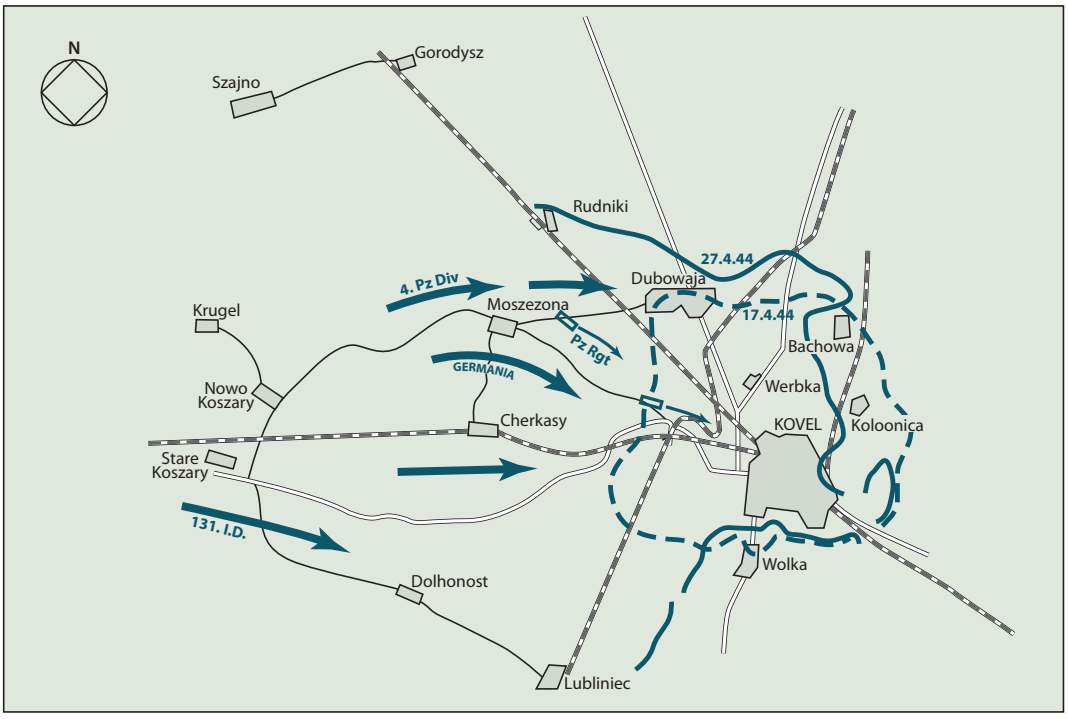
Map 7 The retreat from the Oranienbaum pocket towards Narwa of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, January 1944.



Map 8 The battle of Narwa, February 1944.



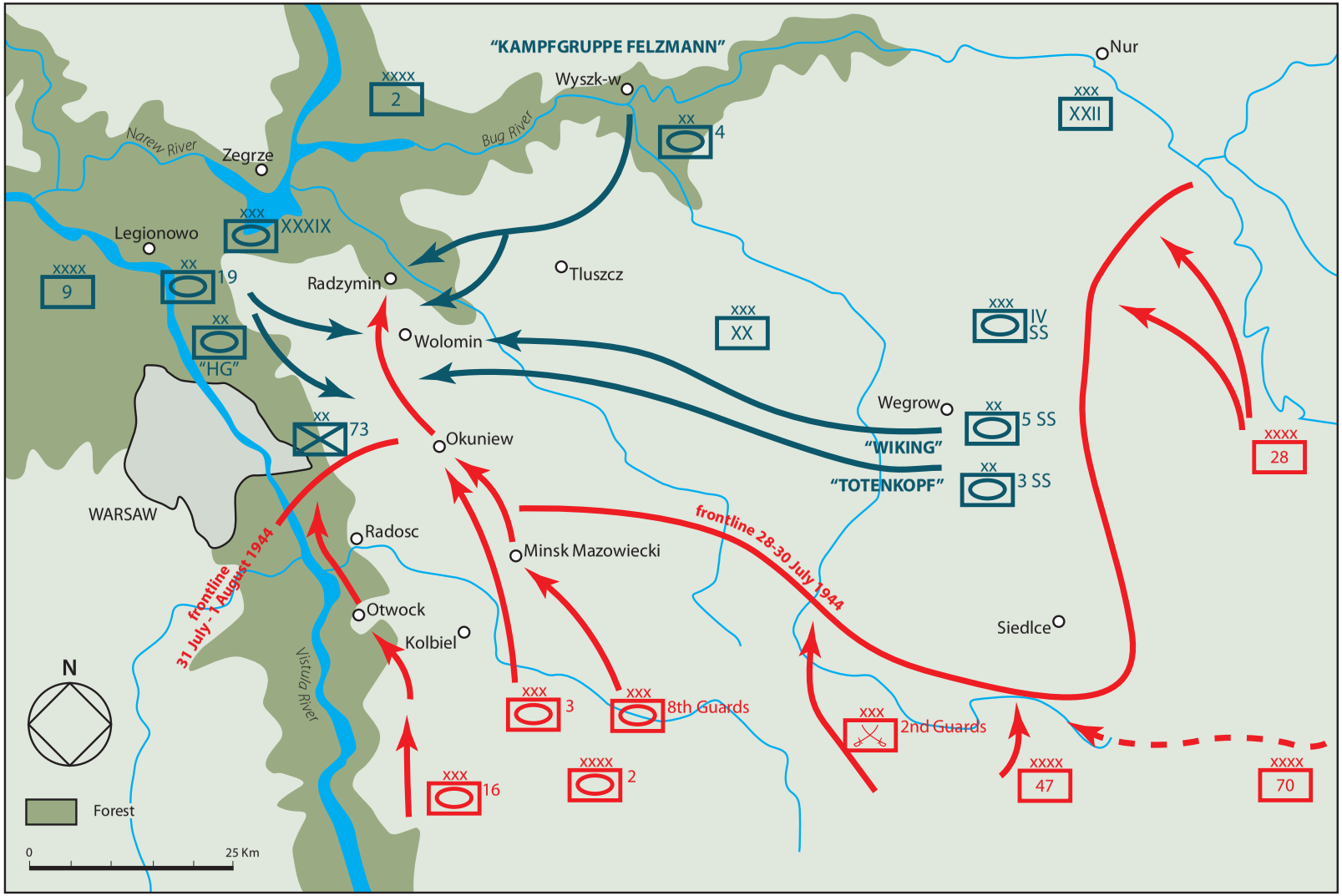
Map 9 The break out of the Cherkassy pocket, February 1944.



Map 10 The relief operation at Kovel, 4/5 April 1944.

N
Map description:
The battles during the summer of 1944 in the border area between Latvia and Lithuania were incredibly confusing. The battalion was sent back and forth, while the enemy's goal was to capture the town of Duagavpils/Dünaburg.
1 13 July: The battalion unloads at Kokneseand Jēkabpils.
2 14 July: A night time reconnaissance patrol advanced via Suvainiskis – Aknīste - Rokiškis and encountered the enemy a further 5 km away.
3 16 July: The battalion moved through Rokiškis towards the south of Kamajai in order to halt the enemy advance between Svėdasai and Užpalia directed towards the north.
4 17 July: Enemy attacks east of Svėdasai towards Juodonys.
5 19 July: Continued enemy assaults along the road between Svėdasai- Kamajai
6 20 July: Battles around Panemunis
RIGA
LATVIA
1 Koknese
Krustpils
1 Jēkabpils
2
Aknīste
Suvainiskis
2
Panemunis 6
Rokiškis
Daugavpils/
Dünaburg
Kamajai
5
4
Juodonys
Svėdasai 3
3 Užpalia
3
LITHUANIA

Map 11 *Kampfgruppe Kleffel* in Latvia, 14-21 July 1944.

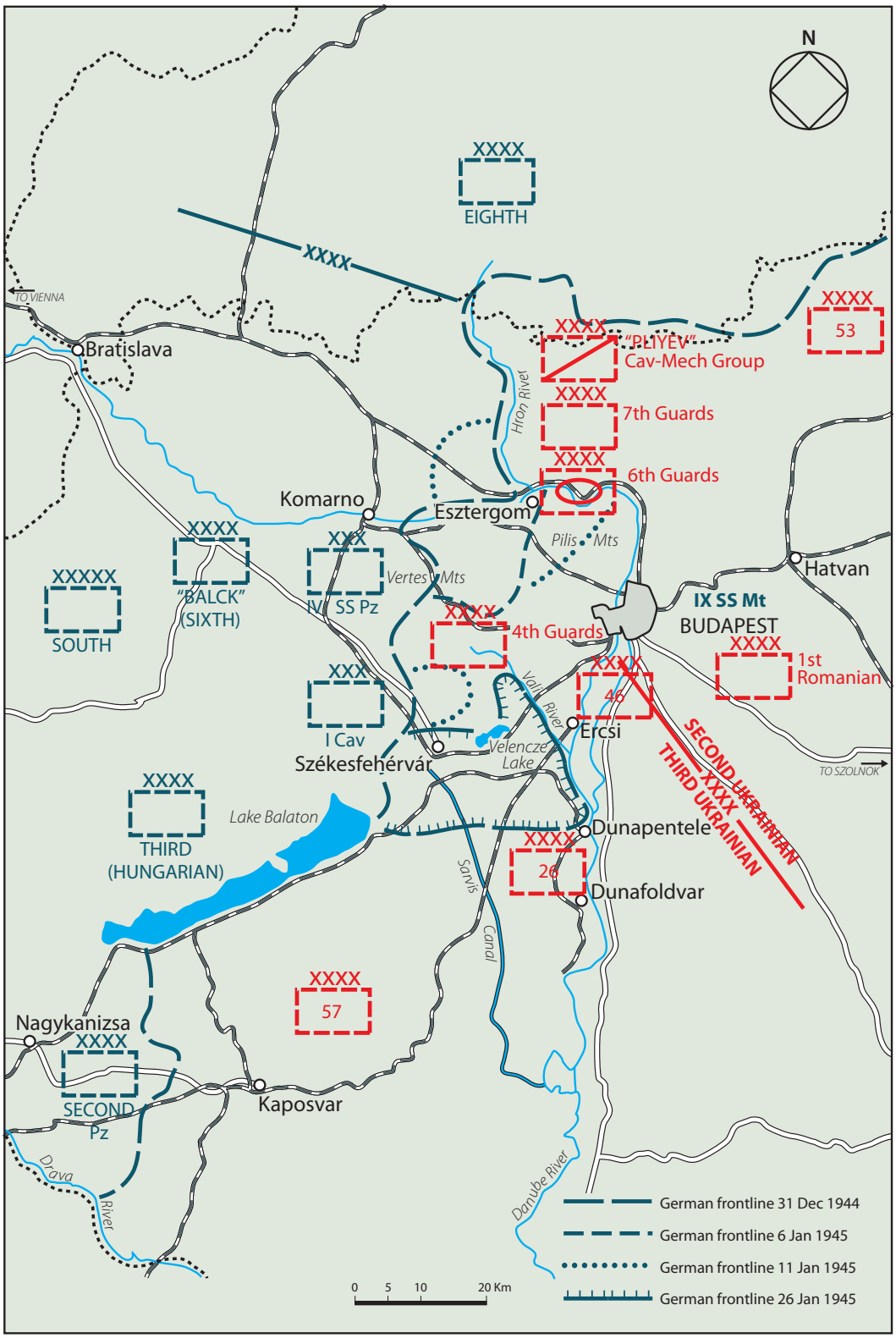


Map 12 The combat near Warsaw, 31 July 1944.

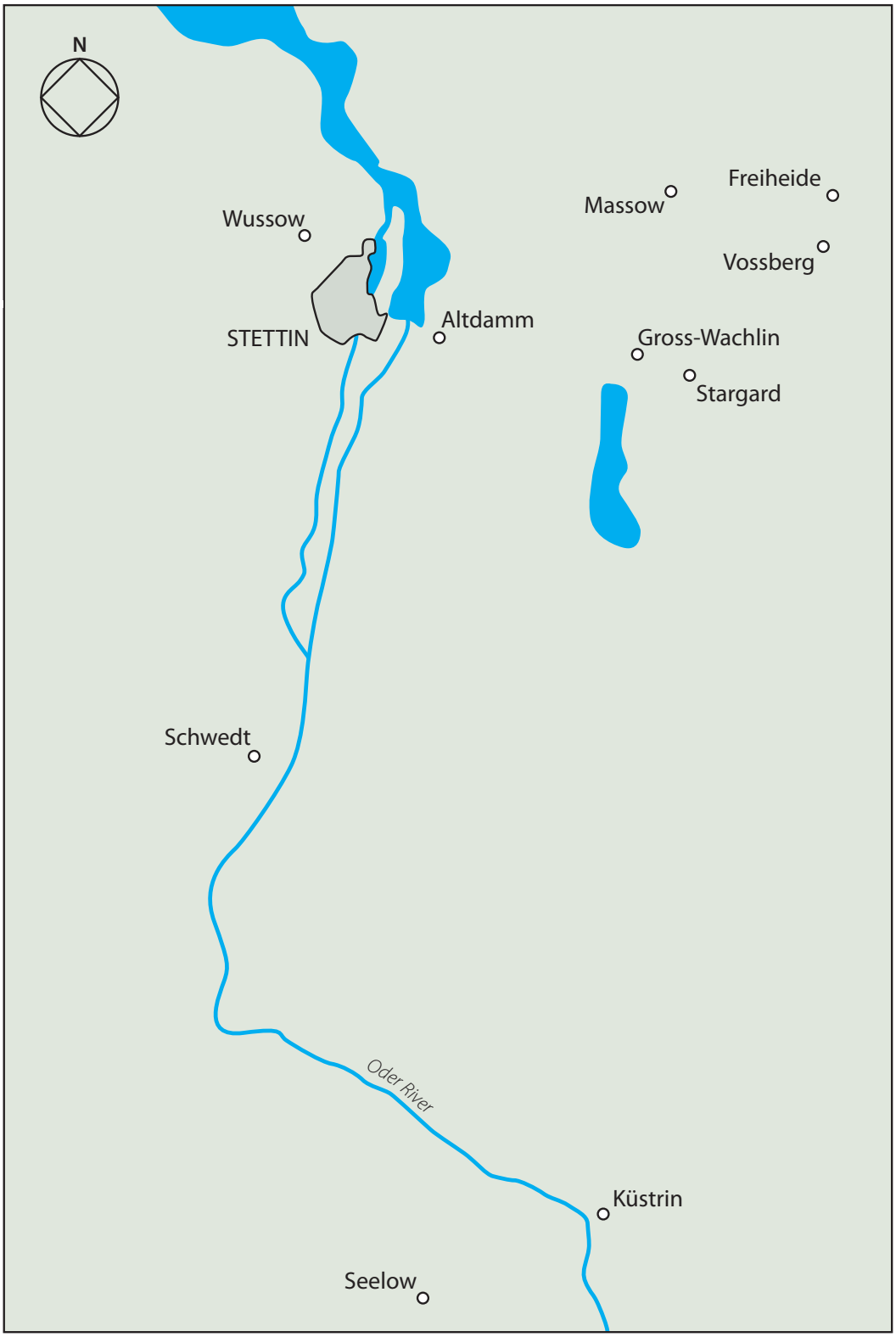
Map 13 The battles around Dorpat, August 1944.

Map 14 The battles in the Courland pocket, southern sector, October 1944-January 1945.

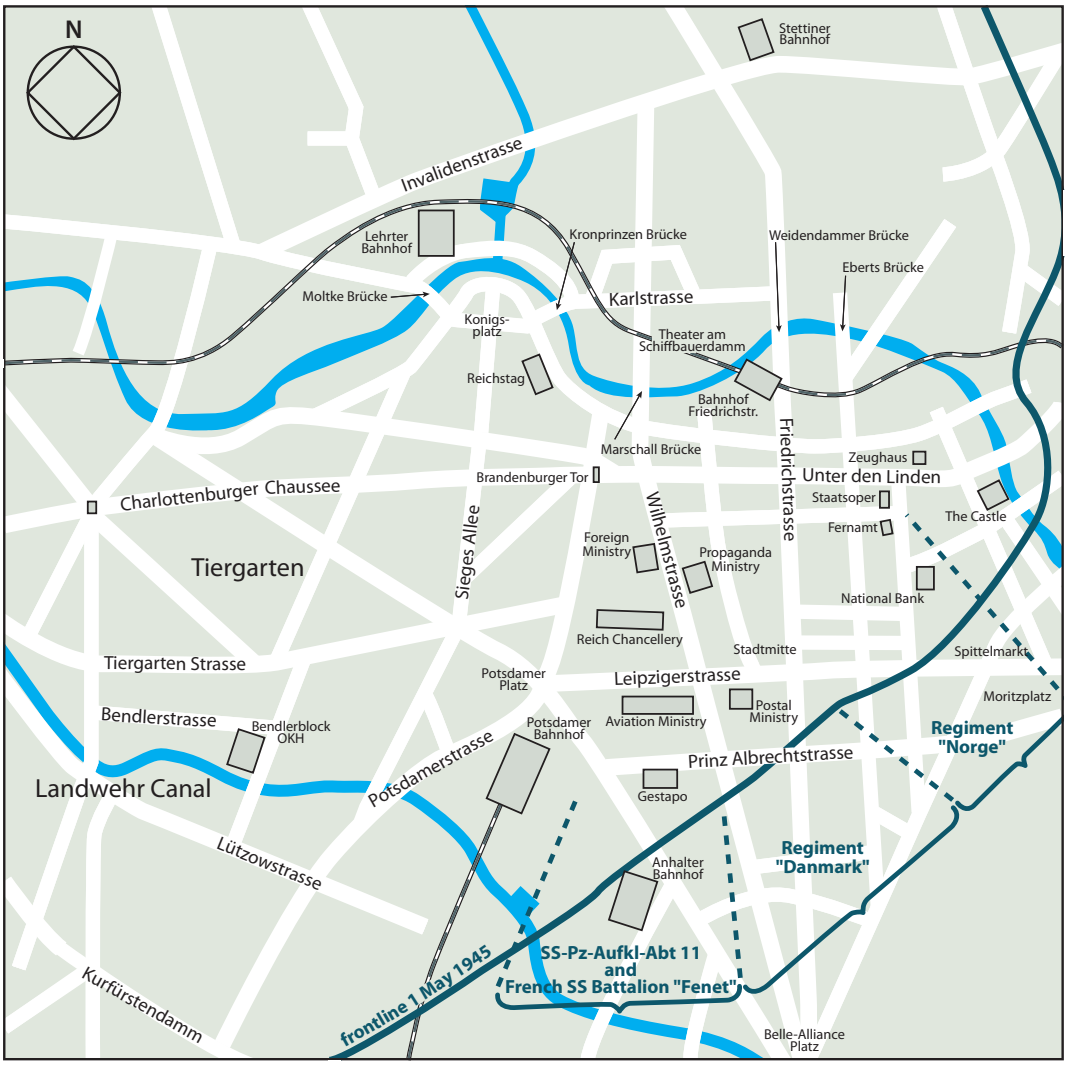
Map 15 Operation Birke – the retreat from Finland, September-October 1944.



Map 16 The relief attempts on Budapest, January 1945.



Map 17 Pomerania, January-April 1945.



Map 18 The Battle of Berlin 1945.

6

Swedish Volunteers in the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps*

11. SS-FRW.-PANZERGRENADIER-DIV. 'NORDLAND' AND THE *'NEDERLAND'-BRIGADE*

The idea of a Swedish *SS* unit and the Estonian-Swedes

German authorities attempted persuade the Swedish government to join the Axis powers, or at least approve the creation of a Swedish volunteer unit, during the early stages of the war in the east; both suggestions were rejected. Those who came to join the *SS* during 1941-42 instead found themselves mainly scattered throughout the *'Wiking' Division*, often serving without any connection to other Swedish volunteers. However by 1943, the Swedish *SS* volunteer organization was at its peak. Swedes served as officers or participated in officers' training; they were also involved in administrative services at the *SS-Hauptamt*. Thus it seems likely that the *SS* hierarchy considered it time to establish a homogeneous Swedish unit without sanction from the Swedish home government. The idea, however, was doomed to fail, and the volunteers would instead be loosely collected in the new *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps (*Third Germanic *SS*-Panzer Corps).

The order to create the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was issued on 30 March 1943 by **Adolf Hitler.**[1] By that time a number Swedes who would serve in the corps' main component, the *'Nordland' Division*, had enlisted in the *SS*. In addition to those who went directly to the Division, several volunteers who had served in the *'Wiking' Division* were also transferred to the new-formed division.[2] Perusal of the number of Swedish enlistees demonstrates that 1943 was a peak year for recruitment. A total of around 35 Swedish volunteers and about 18 Estonian-Swedes would be attached to the corps, and from the second half of 1943 onwards, most of them served within the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, the third company of *'Nordland's'* armoured reconnaissance battalion. There was an organisational reason for placing the Swedes in the same company; from German documents it is clear a Swedish company was to be established, according to several volunteers, by direct order of ***Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler**.

There would, even if the Swedes were grouped together and serving under command of Swedish officers and NCO's, be great morale problems. Desertions, discharge applications, wounds and fatalities would beset the unit throughout its existence. In contrast to *'Wiking' Division* volunteers during the first two years of the war in the east, the *'Nordland' Division* would almost constantly be either in retreat or participating in desperate defensive battles against an enemy who was superior

1 Tätigkeitsbericht, *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps*. IIa. 30.3.43. (PK archive)

2 Tieke, p. 1.

in both men and material. The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* is however merely to be considered as a makeshift solution: the plans to create a Swedish *SS* unit had been far more sophisticated, and go back several months prior to the creation of the *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps*.

Regiment Narwa (1942/43)

On the northern coast of Estonia were a number of Estonian-Swedish settlements (population approximately 10,000 in 1940) with 13th Century antecedents. Although not Swedish citizens, the inhabitants considered themselves ethnic Swedes and many spoke the language. During the fall of 1942, the *SS* took particular interest in these settlements as a potential recruiting source. Swedish ***SS-Obersturmführer* Sven Rydén (b. 1897)** had visited these settlements during September 1942, and during the following month some 50 Estonian-Swedes were sent to the Sennheim training camp to receive military instruction from *Germanische Leitstelle.* The idea was that these men would be trained to form a home-guard unit known as '*Odalvärnet*', after which they would be sent home.[3]

During the following November, the *SS* renewed their area presence once again, this time as a medical examination group disguised as a general health examination team that visited the Estonian-Swedish settlements in order to examine the populace as potential base for further *SS* recruitment.[4] Although women and children were examined during the process, the real reason for the visit became clear by December, after **Rydén** returned. He was employed at the *Germanische Leitstelle* of the *SS-Hauptamt,* which was tasked with the recruitment of foreign volunteers and, by his own admission, was tasked with an official mission to establish a Swedish *SS* unit. At the end of 1942 and during the following months, he had written to a Swedish *SS* officer candidate at *Junkerschüle Bad Tölz* to ask for assistance in creating lists of volunteers in order to contact and gather them in. He also corresponded with **Sven-Olof Lindholm**, the chief of the *SSS* party in Sweden, to request a list of all the party members. The possible connection of these queries with the establishment of a Swedish *SS* unit remains unknown, but the attempt to collect such data points towards such a conclusion.[5] As it was impossible to recruit volunteers in Sweden, and not nearly enough were already serving in the *SS* to fill a whole battalion, **Rydén** was forced to a compromise solution – the Estonian-Swedes.

The unit under discussion was the proposed *SS-Regiment* '*Narwa*' which was supposed to be organized with one battalion of Estonian and Germans, one battalion of Finns and Germans, and one battalion composed of Swedes and Germans.[6] During **Rydén's** visits during the winter of 1942/spring of 1943, a recruiting tour was arranged with the hope that 250 volunteers could be obtained. However, the general population of the targeted Estonian-Swedish settlements began to flee to Sweden in order to avoid potential German mobilization and possible Soviet occupation.[7] Around 129 men, according to **Rydén,** had volunteered before the majority deserted, leaving 18 recruits for transport to Sennheim.[8] Plans for this regiment were, simultaneously with those

3 Kungl. Svenska Beskickningen. "Informationer från Estland". Nr. 663. Berlin, 16.6.43.

4 P.M. Angående läkarundersökning av vapenföra estlandssvenskar till *Waffen-SS*. (RA)

5 Letter from Sven Rydén to Sven Olof Lindholm. Berlin. 2.7.42. (NARA/BDC) and Interrogation of Jakob Yngve Hellenborg. 5.4.43. P3117. (RA)

6 Letter to *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler from the General Commissar in Reval, 21.5.43. (Petter Kjellander archive) and document from the *Führerhauptquartier*. (Petter Kjellander archive)

7 Kungl. Svenska Beskickningen. "Informationer från Estland". Nr. 663. Berlin, 16.6.43.

8 Samtal med *SS*-officer av svensk nationalitet ang. estlandssvenskarna m.m. Berlin, Militärattachén. Nr. 51/1944. 29.1.44.

SS-Obersturmführer Sven Rydén. (Martin Månsson)

announcing the creation of the *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps,* presented to ***Reichsführer-SS*** **Himmler** on 21 May 1943, although nothing more occurred beyond this paper establishment.[9] The 18 Estonian-Swedes gathered **Rydén** would instead be sent as reinforcements to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.*

Swedish *SS* Recruits (1943)

More Swedes appeared, despite the fact that the fortunes of war were turning against Germany at the start of 1943, willing to join the *SS* in addition to the Estonian-Swedes. The turning point of the war came during that year, with the capitulation of the *6. Armee* at Stalingrad in February followed by the Battle of Kursk in July-August. On other fronts, the war in Africa ended with a German defeat and the remains of the once glorious *Deutsche Afrika Korps* was withdrawn to Italy. At the same time, the Allied terror bombardment of German cities escalated, leaving many of the old towns and cities heaps of smoking rubble.

Just as with the volunteers for the *'Wiking' Division*, personal motivations amongst the Swedish volunteers differed. Ideology was recurring motivation, with many *'Nordland' Division* recruits having membership in National Socialist parties. Others had personal reasons like unemployment. However, the recent German set-backs also motivated some of the Swedes, the prevailing feeling being that every man should do his duty to "protect Western culture" from the Red Army.

Most of the newer Swedish recruits would, just as their predecessors in *'Wiking'*, undergo basic training at Sennheim and Klagenfurt, where they actually served in the replacement battalion of *Rgt. Westland*. It was not until they moved to Grafenwöhr/Auerbach in the summer of 1943 that they were transferred to the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps*.

Ingmar Somberg (b. 1924) crossed the Norwegian border in the middle of January 1943. He had joined the *SSS* and applied for a passport during the fall of 1942, in hopes his attempts to gain employment within the German war industry would be expedited. Family circumstances,

9 Letter to *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler from General Commissar in Reval, 21.5.43. (Petter Kjellander ardchive) and document from the *Führerhauptquartier*. (Petter Kjellander archive)

particularly the relationship between **Somberg** and his stepmother, were the primary reason for the willingness to emigrate.[10] Informed his passport application had been denied (January 1943) he chose to cross the border illegally. Throughout the post-war years, **Somberg** would claim, during the course of several interviews, to have served in the *SS* from 1941. This can be dismissed as nothing more than an attempt to inflate his importance. By the files in his Swedish security police dossier it is more than clear that he did not leave Sweden until 1943. Lies like these made him unpopular with surviving Swedish volunteers – one of whom, having served with him in the *'Nordland' Division,* described his former comrade as "That damned guy Somberg, he was nothing but a damn fool ".[11]

Following a *Gestapo* interrogation in Oslo, during which several attempts were made to pressure him into relating information about Swedish weapons systems, **Somberg** was permitted to leave Norway for the Reich, where he received employment at the Skoda armaments plant.[12]

Jan Dufwa, a 19-year old National Socialist from Stockholm, crossed the border into Norway on the 8 February 1943, where he enlisted in the *SS* without his parents' permission. He had been a very active *SSS* party member, and amongst other things, discussed leaving Sweden together with another party member who, nevertheless, followed in his footsteps some weeks later.

Erik Wallin (b. 1921) deserted from his Swedish anti-aircraft regiment (*Lv 7*) at Luleå, a town in northern Sweden, at the close of January 1943. He had been a member of the Swedish National Socialist organization *Nordic Youth* and served in the Finnish Winter War from January 1940. Following a failed attempt to join the *Waffen-SS* in early 1941, he instead joined the Swedish volunteers on the Finnish Hanko Front during the summer of 1941.[13] In April of 1942 he returned to Sweden and military service. As he was a quite experienced soldier he had no interest in the, in his opinion, boring service in a neutral army. His mother, concerned that her son would try to return to back to the war zone, warned Swedish authorities of her son's plans to do so with his friend **Fred Nilsson** in October 1942. **Nilsson** had just returned from service with the *'Wiking' Division*.[14] Nothing occurred until January 1943 when **Wallin,** having received a slight injury, was placed in the regimental infirmary. While there he received a message from **Nilsson** relating his intent to re-join the *SS*. **Wallin** subsequently deserted and, together with **Nilsson** and his companion **Gunnar Eklöf –** home for leave from the *SS* – crossed the Finnish border. **Wallin** was then dispatched via Berlin to Sennheim Camp in occupied France for basic training.[15] There he was offered to sign a four year enlistment contract, but managed to negotiate it down to only cover one year of service.

Two other soldiers serving in the same Swedish regiment as **Wallin** deserted to join the *SS* in early 1943. **Walther Nilsson** (b.1921) told his friend **Carl Martin Ågrahn** (b. 1922) about his intentions to desert via Finland and asked if he was interested in joining him.[16] Both men sympathized with Finland's struggle against the Soviet Union, but as it had become quite difficult to obtain a release to join the fighting, they decided to enlist in the *SS* instead. Thus they deserted on the 22 February 1943. They presented themselves, after crossing the Finnish frontier, to a nearby German unit. Originally slated for service with the *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division Nord*, contrary instructions from Berlin ordered them to Germany. **Nilsson** spent several days in Berlin whilst **Ågrahn** continued on to Sennheim. That same month, **Karl-Olof Holm** (b. 1920) deserted. Some sources claim he joined the *SS* together with **Ågrahn** and **Nilsson**, but this contention remains

10 P.M. concerning passport application for Ingmar Somberg 1946. P6338. (RA)
11 Interview with *SS-Rttf.* Elis Höglund by author. (August 2006).
12 Compilation of Hd 316/44. Somberg, Jacob Ingmar. Stockholm 27.11.47. P6338. (RA)
13 Finnish service record for Erik Wallin. (KrA)
14 Interrogation of Ulf Birger Grubbström. 12.1.43. (RA)
15 Abstract from P.M. 15.6.43. (RA)
16 Classified P.M. Stockholm. 22.11.43. (RA)

unsubstantiated. He had, more than likely, only been acquainted with them. **Holm's** brother had no memory of him being a National Socialist. However, Karl-Olof was angry about not seeing combat during the Winter War.[17] This was specifically mentioned in a letter written during his service with the *SS*.[18] In another written shortly after joining the *SS* he stated:

> Public opinion is probably pretty strong, but I could not really remain at home. It would not have ended well I think, but I'll come back and hope that everything will be fine again. As things were, I could not stand it, therefore I am here now.[19]

By the end of February/early March, two convinced Swedish National Socialists (**Nils Berg** (b.1920) and **Knut Wilgoth Fagerström** (b.1919) left Sweden for Norway to join the *SS*.[20] He had been a member of the SNSP Party since 1936, but left it after just a few months. He then joined the NU – Nordic Youth, the Swedish equivalent of the *Hitlerjugend* in May 1937. Expelled the following year for breaking into the office of a left wing youth organisation with other *NU*-members,[21] he then joined the extremist breakout party '*Sun Wheel*' which had been established during 1938 in response to the *SSS* party's change of direction i.e., the creation of a home-grown form of National Socialism.[22] **Berg** had been interested in National Socialism since 1937, joining the *NU* that same year.[23] The outbreak of the Winter War in 1939 generated a hatred for the Soviet Union as a potential threat to all Scandinavian countries.[24] In 1940 he left the *NU* and attempted to join the Swedes fighting in Finland. However, failure to complete compulsory military service caused him to be rejected.[25]

During the summer of 1942, **Berg** and **Fagerström** attempted to establish their own National Socialist party. Joining them was **Yngve Hellenborg** (b. 1917), who had previously served in the *Waffen-SS,* and **Åke Regnell** (b. 1919).[26] The party never achieved popularity and, after a few months, it folded. Instead, **Regnell** became acquainted with **Fred Nilsson** who had just returned home following service with the *SS*. **Regnell** now expressed interested in becoming an *SS-Kriegsberichter*. Having made his way to Norway, he signed the necessary enlistment papers. Found unfit for service, he returned home a few months later. Back in Sweden, he met **Berg** and **Fagerström**, who now expressed ambitions to serve as war correspondents.[27] Thus **Berg** contacted the German Consulate in Stockholm in order to investigate potential opportunities. Informed they had to make their way to Norway in order to enlist, the two friends decided to proceed with hopes that they would find civilian employment with the German occupation authorities. They would, if this proved impossible, join the *SS* instead.[28] No civilian work being available, they left for Norway on 25 March; the first leg on the long journey to Sennheim camp.[29]

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17 Compilation concerning phone conversation with Karl-Olof Hol's brother, Erik "Ekke" Holm. 17.10.87. (Author's archive)
18 Letter from Karl-Olof Holm. 14.3.44. (Author's archive)
19 Letter from Karl-Olof Holm, 16.3.43. (Author's archive)
20 P.M. concerning Knut Wilgot Fagerström, born on 6 February 1919. P4106. (RA)
21 Ibid.
22 Interrogation with Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
23 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Compilation of case P4106 concerning the Swedish citizen Knut Wilgot Fagerström. P4106. (RA)
27 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
28 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)
29 Ibid.

That same month, the 20-year-old suspected communist **Stig Olsén** crossed the Norwegian border and travelled to Oslo to enlist in the *SS*.[30] The border crossing was quite dramatic: spotted and pursued by a Swedish patrol, he managed to cross under small arms fire without injury. His parents, initially unaware of his intentions, made several attempts to locate him via the Swedish consulate. They would never see him again.[31]

Enlisting that same month, **Lars Hellmér** (b. 1921), the son of an estate owner, hailed from Eskilstuna**.** Employed at a saw-mill before joining the '*Swedish Volunteer Corps*' during the Winter War, but would not see action. On 1 July 1942, he joined the Swedish volunteers at the Jandeba front. Serving for 232 days, he participated in the defence of the Syväri Bridgehead. On 25 February 1943, he returned home with high praise (3+) from his superiors. He then resumed military service for a short time, before deserting to Norway with Stockholm resident **Stig Pettersson** (b. 1919) on 14 March.[32] **Pettersson** had also served with the volunteers in Finland and, according to **Ågrahn**, was a very experienced soldier.[33] His claims that **Pettersson** participated in "all the Finnish wars" and had been decorated with nine awards are contradicted by his P.M. Having fought in Finland on the Hanko Front between July and December 1941, **Pettersson** re-enlisted at the end of November 1942. He would however only serve until February 1943, most of this time being spent in hospital.[34]

He escaped to Norway one month after. Enlistment in the *Waffen-SS*, according to a letter sent to his father, occurred shortly thereafter. However, it appears his service was apparently rear-echelon and there is no indication he saw action with a front-line unit. Just as in Finland, he fell ill and was placed at the *SS-Panzergrenadier-Ausbildung u. Ersatz-Btl. 11* in Graz, Austria, where he served with the rank of *SS-Rottenführer.* He was, during this recovery period, granted a visit to Norway, during which he fled to Sweden in March 1944.[35]

On 13 April 1943, **Gösta Stawåsen** (b. 1918) crossed the border into Norway. The one-time communist acolyte had been attending meetings of the NSAP Party since 1934, although it would take four years for him to apply for membership. When his communistic friends found out about his membership in the party, Threatened with physical harm by his former political associates, he abandoned the NSAP in April 1939, only to re-join in the fall of 1940. Re-designated the '*SSS'* Party' by this time, **Stawåsen** was subsequently made responsible party newspaper sales. His efforts were rewarded by acceptance into the *Sveaborg* frontline organisation.[36]

Visiting party headquarters almost daily, **Stawåsen** became acquainted with **Jan Dufwa**, with whom he had previously discussed enlistment in the *SS*. Consequent unemployment resulting from discovery of his earlier political association forced him, as with **Dufwa** a few weeks earlier, to cross the Norwegian border. Following enlistment in the '*Germanske SS Norwegen*', the Norwegian equivalent of the *Allgemeine-SS*, he participated in a parade before the Norwegian leader **Vidkun Quisling** when the Norwegian volunteer legion, *Den Norske Legion,* returned home in May 1943. Portions of the latter were to form the new *Rgt. 'Norge* within the *'Nordland' Division*. **Stawåsen**, no doubt inspired, decided to enlist with the volunteers before their departure for Germany. He was then sent to Sennheim-camp to undergo military training.[37]

30 List of volunteers compiled by Karl-Martin Ågrahn. 13.12.43. P5642. (RA)
31 P.M. to case P.4205. (MUST)
32 Finnish service record for Lars-Gunnar Hellmér. (KrA)
33 List of volunteers compiled by Karl-Martin Ågrahn. 13.12.43. P5642. (RA)
34 P.M. concerning Lars Stig Gottfrid Pettersson. 10.2.44. (MUST)
35 Document from the *SS-Ersatzkommando Norwegen* concerning the desertion of *SS-Rttf.* Stig Pettersson. 22.3.44. (RA)
36 Compilation to case Hd.866/44. 9.8.44. P4465. (RA)
37 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944. P4465. (RA)

Gösta Stawåsen. (Author's archive)

Training of the Swedish Volunteers (1943)

The training of Swedes who would later serve in *11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Nordland'* was similar to that of the volunteers serving with the *'Wiking' Division*. Most of the former's NCOs and enlisted men were new recruits who had to undergo basic training at Sennheim and Klagenfurt, while those with previous combat experience were directly sent from the Sennheim to Grafenwöhr camp, where the corps was being formed. At the end of April, **John-Erik Eriksson** (b. 1916), who had joined the *SS* in Finland in late 1942, had already reached the Grafenwöhr after initial training at Sennheim.[38] Having previously served as volunteer in Finland, he had been discharged after being found unfit for service.[39] Subsequent civilian employment and low wages made him enlist to the *SS*.

The creation of the new corps was instituted at the Grafenwöhr camp on the 30 April 1943. Combining *'Wiking'* and the *11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Nordland'*, the latter division was to have a component regiment consisting of Dutch volunteers. The latter objecting, it was instead decided to create the separate *SS-Freiwillige-Brigade 'Nederland'* which replaced *'Wiking'*. The latter was instead formed into a corps with the '*Totenkopf-Division*' in the summer of 1944. The plan was that the *'Nordland' Division* would consist of the two volunteer legions *Freikorps Danmark* and *Den Norske Legion,* which would be transformed into fighting regiments. Divisional command was given to ***SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS*** **Fritz von Scholz** in early May 1943. In addition, the battle-proven *Regiment 'Nordland'* from the

38 Interrogation of John Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA)

39 P.M. to case XII 83/Ä 2233. (RA)

'Wiking' Division was transferred to become the organizational basis for a new Regiment, "*Norge*": "*Den Norske Legion*" became the *I./Rgt 'Norge', II./Rgt. 'Nordland'* became the *II./Rgt. "Norge"* and *I./Rgt. 'Nordland'* became the *III./Rgt. 'Norge'*.[40]

Members of the *Freikorps* "*Danmark*" would form the organizational basis of the *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 24 'Danmark'*. This was greeted with disdain by Danish volunteers, as they preferred to be organized as an independent unit within the *SS*. Some of these volunteers were granted a discharge. This situation gradually improved and support elements, including an anti-aircraft battalion, engineer battalion, field-replacement battalion and an armoured reconnaissance battalion (*SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11)* were subsequently organized.[41] It was, given the dearth of Nordic volunteers, also decided to enlist large numbers of ethnic-Germans – the so-called *Volksdeutsche* – from Romania.

Swedish volunteers at Sennheim (Early 1943)

A small number of Swedish volunteers had already undergone basic training by the time **Nils Berg** and **Knut Fagerström** reached Sennheim camp. Also present, according to **Berg**, were **Walther Nilsson**, **Karl-Martin Ågrahn**, **Jan Dufwa**, **Karl-Olof Holm**, **Erik Wallin**, **Stig Olsén** and **Sven Nordqvist**.[42] At the same time, a large group of Estonian-Swedes also underwent their instruction there. One volunteer late recalled:

> In *'Nordland'* we were a total of 18 Estonian Swedes, nine from Wormsö and nine from Noarootsi. Curiously, only one, Arthur Thomson, was killed at Narwa in 1944. *Obersturmführer* Rydén called us "cowardly dogs" when we didn't want to fight in the *Waffen-SS*. Finally, we were 18 men who were recruited to the camp in Sennheim for two months with the promise of stylish uniforms. I signed up for the *Waffen-SS*, as most from my home in northern Wormsö had already joined.[43]

During their time at Sennheim the Swedish volunteers were visited by **Heinrich Himmler** and a photo published in the newspaper *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* shows **Himmler** in conversation with **Holm, Ågrahn, Nilsson** and an unknown Estonian-Swede.[44]

Camp life, **Ågrahn** subsequently recollected, was extremely thorough:

> Sennheim is a training camp for the Germanic volunteers of the *Waffen-SS*. The education – in its military aspect – is non-existent; sports, music and politics dominate. The food is plentiful, but somewhat too Gallic to appeal to Northerners. The camp routine is – after an idea that previously occurred to me – designed to initiate [the volunteers] in climate, diet, common language and impart practical military information. Illiterates are assisted by an 'abc' orientation. The training period is supposed to stretch over a 4-6 week period, but the average is more like 6 weeks.[45]

40 Tieke, p.2.
41 Ibid, p. 4.
42 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)
43 Gyllenhaal/Westberg, p. 293.
44 The photo was first published in November 1943.
45 Letter to Swedish police from Karl-Martin Ågrahn about his service and the *Waffen-SS*, 20.12.43. P5642. (RA)

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler visits the Swedish volunteers during training. Seen in the picture are Walther Nilsson, Karl-Olof Holm and Karl-Martin Ågrahn, plus an unidentified Estonian-Swede. The picture was published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, where Himmler was described as "the fear and nightmare of the democrats". (Author's archive)

After one week, **Ågrahn** – an experienced soldier since 1939 – felt the training was unnecessary and managed to secure a transfer to the NCO school at the Grafenwöhr. There he would participate in a six-week course before being sent to *'Totenkopf'*-Division deployed on the Eastern Front. He remained there for one month before being sent back (June 1943) to Grafenwöhr to participate in the establishment of the new corps.[46]

Somberg claims that in late February he was sent to Berlin for questioning at the *SS-Hauptamt* on suspicion of espionage. He later claimed, no evidence having come to light, that he was allowed to return to the armament factory where he was employed. Encouraged to enlist in *Waffen-SS*, he baulked due to poor physical health directly related to previous military service. He was, therefore, offered six weeks' leave at a French rest home; to this he readily agreed. **Somberg**, on arrival, discovered the 'home' was actually Sennheim training camp, thus he considered that he had been tricked into joining the *Waffen-SS*.[47]

It appears Germans authorities decided to exploit the fact that many Swedes were concentrated in the same place. As Sweden was a neutral country, the Germans had an interest in intelligence concerning its military. According to **Walther Nilsson**, the Swedish volunteers were invited one by one to the officers' mess, where they were served alcohol and questioned about their country's military capacity, plans for mobilization, and whether they were willing to spy on behalf of the Third

46 Interrogation of Carl-Levi Martin Ågrahn, 11.12.43. P5642. (RA)

47 Interrogation of Ingmar Johansson Somberg, 29.12.45. P6338. (RA)

Reich. He did not know if any of the volunteers had actually agreed to participate in such activities.[48] However, it seems likely the Germans might have had some success. **Ågrahn** heard rumours about one of the Swede, **Alvar Barwaeus** (b. 1919), who was said to have sold information to the German security service about the Swedish attack aircraft *B-17*. **Barwaeus** himself denied it when asked by **Ågrahn**, but he noted that when other Swedes departed from Sennheim, he remained and was, according to rumour, dispatched to Berlin for special training. He later served as a *Luftwaffe* aircraft mechanic. **Ågrahn** also claimed that **Tage Lindborg** (b. 1918), who enlisted in the *SS* in 1942, along with his older brother **Gösta** (b. 1911), were present in the camp at that time. Amongst the other volunteers it was believed that the younger of the brothers sold military information, as he regularly visited Berlin. On return, he always had plenty of money and cigarettes.[49]

Available information concerning the brothers is most interesting. Both had been communists; **Gösta** having been an active party organizer, while **Tage** remained a sympathizing ideologue without party membership. Both had attempted, prior to being dissuaded by their mother, to volunteer for the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. The outbreak of the Winter War put-paid to these political sympathies, **Gösta** joining the *Swedish Volunteer Corps*. With the start of the Continuation War in 1941, the brothers enlisted the *Swedish Volunteer's Battalion*, but **Tage** arrived too late to serve with the *Swedish Volunteer Battalion* at the front. Civilian life cast aside, they crossed the Norwegian border on 1 September 1942. Unlike most volunteers, they were not sent directly to the Oslo recruitment office. Instead they were arrested and detained in a concentration camp for three weeks, before being allowed enlistment in the *SS*.[50] Following this, they were sent to the Sennheim in late 1942. **Gösta** refused, on arrival, to swear the oath of allegiance, while **Tage** was forced to take the oath. As a result, **Gösta** was sent to Finland, where he joined the *Swedish Volunteer Company* in December 1942. **Tage** remained with the *SS*; **Gösta** would however unsuccessfully plea with the Swedish consulate for assistance in getting his brother home. Returning to his communistic beliefs, he was arrested in Finland for disseminating propaganda, after which he deserted and returned to Sweden, where he continued with his political activities. His brother, on the other hand, became a soldier attached to *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps*, against his will.[51]

The Swedish volunteers were split-up after training ended in mid-May. **Berg, Wallin, Nordqvist** and **Dufwa** were sent to Klagenfurt, while others were sent to Grafenwöhr. As with the Swedes in *'Wiking'*, the volunteers were transferred to Klagenfurt camp in Austria to begin weapons training. This course included a variety of infantry support weapons such as the German standard 8cm mortar. Klagenfurt was also the venue where several volunteers, once part of *Hamilton-Grupp* and *'Wiking'*, awaited permits to return home. Several of these volunteers, amongst them **Ragnar Johansson I** (b.1908),[52] would choose to remain in the *SS* and serve with *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps*.[53] **Jan Dufwa,** who had joined the *SS* in February 1943, became ill during training and was allowed to return home in July. According to **Dufwa,** the training, already arduous, was made worse due to bad treatment. This resulted in a desperate escape attempt by **Berg** and two others. The attempt failed, but, due to the timely intervention by the Swedish Consulate in Berlin, no punishment was meted out.[54] Negative attitudes toward *SS* service would

48 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
49 Interrogation of Carl-Levi Martin Ågrahn, 11.12.43. P5642. (RA)
50 Summary of case Hd. 140/43. 11.12.43. P4702. (RA)
51 Ibid.
52 The reason he was known as 'Ragnar Johansson I' was because *3./AA11* there were actually two Swedes with the name 'Ragnar Johansson'. Ragnar Johansson I was the eldest.
53 Letter from Åke Söderberg to Olof Stolpen. 31.5.43. (Author's archive)
54 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)

Erik Wallin (left) and a Danish volunteer. This picture was most likely taken during training. (Martin Månsson)

however remain with many Swedish volunteers. This was also claimed by **Gösta Stawåsen.** It was, he subsequently stated, six weeks of very hard training before he was dispatched to Grafenwöhr.[55]

In early May 1943, **Sigurd Mohlin** (b. 1924), a resident of Gothenburg, volunteered for the *SS*. While some sources state he enlisted in Norway, **Ågrahn** claims he escaped voluntary labour service in Finland.[56] Several days later, **Johan Westrin**, an NCO in a Swedish Ranger Regiment who had served in Finland, was officially declared as absent without leave. He had by then already signed his service contract in Oslo.[57] Two more Swedish servicemen, **Sven Alm** (b. 1925) and **Rune Wikström** (b. 1925) were home on leave from *Regiment K3* in Skövde in midsummer 1943. With leave at an end, they decided to cross the Norwegian border.[58] **Wikström** who was barely 18-years old, was actually classified 'Letter A' by the Swedish police. The normal classification for Swedish *SS* volunteers was 'Letter B', but by some reason, **Wikström** was considered to be a "dangerous National Socialist".[59] This might have been true due to the fact that visited Germany for several months during 1941-42, but had not served in the *Waffen-SS*. His decision was well considered, in fact, he had informed several German friends of his intentions by letter in January and February 1943.[60] His friend **Alm** seems to have been slightly more complicated. He claimed

55 Ibid.
56 List of *SS* volunteers compiled by Karl-Martin Ågrahn. 13.12.43. P5642. (RA)
57 Swedish service record of Johan Westrin. (KrA)
58 P.M. from district police in Norrtälje. Added to the Criminal Investigation Department on 16.10.44. (RA)
59 To Major Georg Berendt, defense staff, Stockholm from the Criminal Investigation Department, Stockholms police. 21.1.44. (MUST)
60 P.M. to case XII 83/Ä 3187. 21.1.44. (MUST)

to have been interested in National Socialism since his teens, but had not been a member of any party or subscribed to any National Socialist newspaper.[61] He had, in late 1942, actually written to the English Consulate in Stockholm, requesting information about the possibility of serving as a British volunteer.[62] The two friends became acquainted whilst serving in the same Regiment and had often discussed the great threat from the "enemy in the east". Therefore, they felt compelled to make an effort as the fortunes of war turned against Germany. In early June, **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** (b.1920), a soldier serving in the I8 Infantry Regiment, had not returned after a period of leave. Just as with **Alm** and **Wikström**, he had deserted via Norway. He had previously served on the Hanko Front, but had been sent home following a suicide attempt. He was, at the time of his desertion, going through a divorce, so his loyalty to the National Socialist cause is uncertain.[63]

Unlike the *'Wiking' Division*, where practically all Swedish volunteers served as enlisted NCOs or privates, many *'Nordland' Division* Swedes would serve with the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer* or higher, thus making them commissioned *SS* officers. They received training at the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz,* an officers' candidate school in southern Germany. **Gunnar Eklöf** who had returned from his leave together with **Erik Wallin** and **Fred Nilsson** in January 1943, was sent to the *9. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* at Bad Tölz, where he meet **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** who had been previously fought with *Freikorps Danmark* in the Demjansk-Pocket.[64] Their officer training lasted from February to July 1943. **Eklöf** was granted home leave after graduation. In Stockholm, he had a tailor make him a brand new officer's uniform which he wore while giving a speech at *Sveaborg* meeting headquarters. There he informed the audience that ***Reichsführer-SS*** **Heinrich Himmler** had promised to create a company of Swedish volunteers – *3./SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteliung 11* – that would be transported in armoured trucks.[65] **Pehrsson** was sent from Bad Tölz to the Grafenwöhr after a shorter period of leave which he spent with his family in Denmark. **Eklöf** would remain in Sweden until the late autumn of 1943.[66]

On reaching Grafenwöhr Camp in summer of 1943, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** was far from the sole Swede there, the Klagenfurt contingent had been transferred there in June. More would arrive during the following weeks.[67] One volunteer, **Frans Wahlberg (**b. 1900) was by then an experienced soldier who had, in addition to serving as an officer in the Swedish home guard, seen action in the Finnish Civil War (1918), Spanish civil war (1936-39), Winter War (1939-40) and, since 1941, with the *SS* as part of *Regiment* '*Westland*' of the *'Wiking' Division*.[68] According to another *'Wiking'* veteran, who met with him whilst on leave in Norway at the end of 1942, **Wahlberg** was by then in temporary service with the *Gestapo* and had been employed on their behalf in Sweden. It has only been confirmed that he actually was in Norway during this period. The other claims remain unsubstantiated. According to the Swedish authorities, he had not been in Sweden since 1941.[69] When **Gösta Stawåsen** reached Grafenwöhr, he claimed that around 20 Swedes and about the same number of Estonian-Swedes underwent training there.[70]

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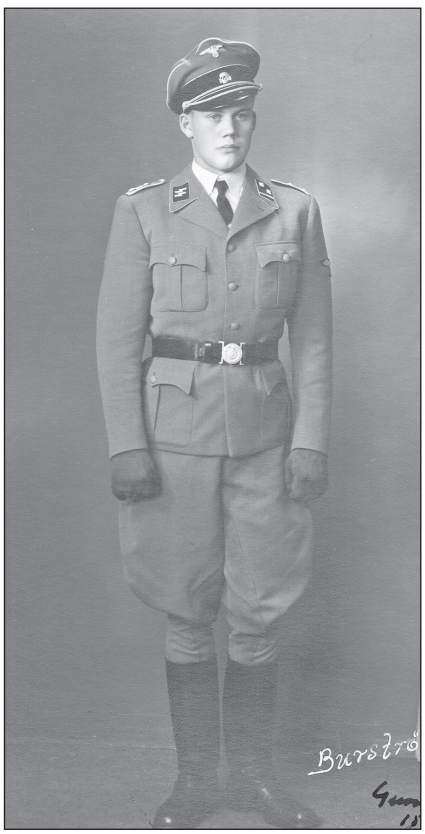
61 Report Saturday 7.4.45 concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. G-akt 140:161. (RA)
62 Letter from Sven Alm, 31.12.42. G.akt 140:161. (RA)
63 Document from the 6th Police Division, 22.12.43 concerning Pehrsson, Karl Erik Wilhelm f 10/1 20. (MUST)
64 List of students of the 9. KjL, Bad Tölz. (NARA/BDC)
65 Abstract from a Sveaborg meeting held at Markvardagatan 5 on 21 September 1943. P3592. (RA)
66 Letter from H-G. Pehrsson to King Gustaf V concerning further service in the Swedish army. Post-war. (Copy in Author's archive)
67 The transfer to Grafenwöhr, according to Wallin, took place in the middle of June 1943. (RA)
68 List of volunteers compiled by Karl-Martin Ågrahn. 13.12.43. P5642. (RA)
69 Letter to *SS-Uscha*. Frans Wahlberg 4.11.42, addressed to Norway. P4820. (RA) and P.M. with information concerning Frans Wahlberg as related by Kurt Allan Lundin, 12.1.44. P4820. (RA)
70 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)

Students of the *9. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* at Bad Tölz, where both Gunnar Eklöf and Hans-Gösta Pehrsson studied to become *SS* officers. Eklöf is third from the left. (Geir Brenden)

9. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang Bad Tölz. Hans-Gösta Pehrsson is kneeling to the far left. (Geir Brenden)



Following the training at Bad Tölz, Gunnar Eklöf visited Sweden. Just as during his previous two periods of leave he wore an *SS* uniform. The uniform in the picture was actually produced by a tailor in Stockholm. (A.P.S archive)

Swedes at the Grafenwöhr/Auerbach-Training Grounds (Summer 1943)

Harsh treatment of the Swedish volunteers would continue at Grafenwöhr Camp. **Knut Fagerström** subsequently observed during interrogation:

> The treatment at Auerbach (i.e. Grafenwöhr) had been very poor, so the atmosphere among the Swedes was against further service.[71]

One NCO, as **Erik Wallin** related to **Gösta Stawåsen,** in charge of training, ***SS-Oberscharführer* Sekorsky**, was a "Norwegian and Swede-hater, who considered his charges to be half-soldiers" and forced them to participate in such rigorous training that several of them bled from the ears and nose. The volunteers reacted by putting forward complaints to the company commander, who punished the NCO by ordering him to perform 1500 squats, after which he hospitalized. Swedes were not the only volunteers who were badly treated, Norwegians expressing a similar dissatisfaction. This emerged when they discovered that *Rgt.* '*Norge*' would be led by German officers. As a result, several submitted resignation applications. One volunteer who requested compassionate leave following the death of his mother committed suicide, whilst another died after receiving improper medical treatment when he fell ill.[72]

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson was appointed platoon leader of *3./SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteliung 11 'Nordland'.* This component unit of *'Nordland' Division* was where most Swedish volunteers would serve. By summer 1943, however, most Swedish volunteers would actually be assigned to *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 23* '*Norge*' during corps formation. For example, **Ingmar Somberg** had been posted to '*Den Norske Legion*' by Mitau in May 1943. As the volunteer legion was to be the basis of the new regiment, he was instead transferred to Grafenwöhr where he was attached for a short time to *4./Rgt. 'Norge*'. Objecting to this, he was instead sent to a weapons technician school.[73] Another *Norge* volunteer was **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez,** a Swedish national with dual citizenship who joined the *SS* following military service in October 1942.[74] Basic training at the Sennheim and Klagenfurt camps preceded a transfer to an engineering school in Dresden from there **Eldh-Albiez** was sent to *16./Regiment* '*Norge*', the Regimental engineer company, where he served as *SS-Unterscharführer* until July 1943. Following this he was sent to the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* as an officer candidate in October of the same year.[75] Other Swedes in the Regiment were as follows:

Gösta Stawåsen – *1./Rgt. Norge*
John-Erik Eriksson – *3./Rgt. Norge*
Nils Sture Johansson – *7./Rgt Norge*
Ragnar Johansson (II) – *11./Rgt. Norge*
Erik Wallin, Knut Fagerström, Nils Berg and **Johan Westrin** – Unknown companies.[76]

There was, according to a Norwegian volunteer in the *8./Rgt.* "*Norge*", one Swede present in his company. In fact, he was half-German, but was called "the Swede" because he spoke Swedish.

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71 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
72 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)
73 Interrogation with Ingmar Johansson Somberg, 29.12.45. P6338. (RA)
74 *SS*-Stammkarte, Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez. (NARA/BDC)
75 Information from Geir Brenden who received it from Norwegian veterans who served with Eldh-Albiez.
76 Information from Erik Wallin via Bo B., Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44 (RA), and Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)

The author, however, has not been able to identify the individual in question, but he soon became something of a burden to his comrades. Physically weak and suffering from poor eyesight, he was often targeted for punishment by the commanding officer ***SS-Obersturmführer* Körner.** This affected the remainder of the group, most of which did not wish to serve with him. During one exercise, the hapless Swede-German passed out and was, on awakening, forced to climb a building and emulate a cuckoo by shouting "*Ko-ko! Ko-ko!*". Passing out again, he was transferred to the kitchen staff.[77]

Marcus Ledin (b. 1921), who had previously served in the *'Wiking' Division*, was posted to the Regiment in 1943. According to **Arne Ericsson** (b. 1913), who served with him in the *'Wiking' Division*, he was, with the rank of *SS-Unterscharführer*, attached to *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Norden*' at Grafenwöhr during summer 1943. As no Regiment by this name existed, it is possible he meant '*Rgt. Norge* instead'.[78] Even if this claim is accurate, **Ledin** would not see combat with *'Nordland' Division* until spring of 1944. He was instead transferred to join a group of Swedish volunteer awaiting the start their frontline service. Another veteran of the *'Wiking' Division* present at Grafenwöhr, **Nils Sture Johansson,** would not see service at all with '*Nordland'*. He had previously served in Ukraine where he was wounded. Following his recovery, a short period of leave and depot duty at Klagenfurt, he was sent to Grafenwöhr to participate in the NCO course; promotion to *SS-Unterscharführer* and discharge due to contract expiration occurred shortly afterwards.[79] Subsequent interrogation by the Swedish police occurred in February 1944. His *'Wiking' Division* comrade, **Arne Ericsson**, had informed them a few months earlier that **Johansson** had served in the German security service for a short while.[80] Nothing more was revealed until 1944 when a *SS-Obersturmführer,* who had worked for the security service in Norway, was interrogated. **Johansson**, it seems, had been transferred to Norway whilst awaiting the issue of the necessary paperwork to legally return home. Throughout this period he resided with an ex-Norwegian volunteer. At the officer's request, **Johansson** reported on how the village inhabitants engaged with the volunteers. Finally, when all was in order for the journey home, he was asked to provide information which could be of interest in Sweden. **Johansson** accepted this assignment, but it was the last time his superior heard from him.[81]

Camp training consisted of exercise, political instruction and ordnance courses. For some of the volunteers this regimen was cancelled within a month to allow them to participate in two weeks' harvest assistance.[82] A total twelve Swedish and Estonian-Swedish volunteers applied for membership in the *SSS* party whilst at Grafenwöhr. It remains, however, uncertain whether or not they ever became members. The applications were forwarded by the Berlin *SSS* office chief **Thorolf Hillblad**, who petulantly wrote: "Why the hell do I never receive any membership forms, which I have repeatedly nagged about? Don't you want new members?"[83]

Exactly when the transfer of the volunteers from *Rgt. 'Norge*' to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* occurred is uncertain. A few appear to have been transferred after completion of basic training at Grafenwöhr. **Nils Berg** told subsequently related the following to his interrogators:

77 *Den Frivillige*, pp. 79-81.
78 Classified document concerning Marcus Ledin based on information related by other volunteers 4.8.44. (RA)
79 Interrogation of Nils Sture Johansson, 2.4.44. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
80 Interrogation of Carl Arne Ericsson, 2.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2224. (RA)
81 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Sture Johansson, former Finnish volunteer and *Waffen-SS* soldier 8.2.46. XII 83/Ä 2312. (RA)
82 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
83 Letter from *SSS Landgruppe Deutschland*, to *SSS* party headquarters, Stockholm. 18.9.43. (Author's archive)

> At the end of August 1943 the military training was completed, after which Berg and his comrades were placed within *Division 'Nordland'*, within which they belonged to *Regiment 'Norge'*. The Swedes were, a short time later, assigned to an armoured reconnaissance unit"[84]

His comrade **Knut Fagerström** made similar claims;

> Initially all Swedish volunteers in Germany were organized into the same battalion and subordinate division *'Nordland'* at 'Auerbach'"[85]

Some volunteers joined the Battalion at a later date. German documents confirm that several volunteers would continue their service with *Rgt.* '*Norge*' well into 1944.[86] **Gösta Stawåsen** would not join his Swedish comrades at the front. He fell ill, suffering from a heart condition and fluid in the lung, at the end of July, after which he was sent to a hospital in Marienbad.[87] It is clear that there was organisational thought behind placing Swedes within the same company. Several volunteers claimed that this was on direct order from ***Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler**; it is also possible the appointment to company command of a Swedish-born *SS* officer was also contemplated.[88] ***SS-Obersturmführer* Bengt Hassler**, whilst visiting the volunteers at Grafenwöhr, promised them that treatment would improve when they would serve together. **Fagerström** was of the opinion that **Hassler** would be appointed company commander. This claim was also made by several other volunteers, and is supported by a document related to **Hassler's** training course at Bad Tölz. In it, it was noted that he would initially serve at the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin. Later, when possible, he would be transferred to the *III. Germansiches SS-Panzer-Korps* as a company commander.[89] **Hassler** would, however, request to be discharged, and was finally sent home at the end of 1943. This speculation is also supported by a document from **Gunnar Eklöfs'** Bad Tölz file which states that he was to be attached to the "Swedish company of the III. Germanisches *SS*-Panzer-Korps".[90]

Nevertheless, Swedish-born *SS* officers served with the company, and **Pehrsson** and **Eklöf** would not be the sole Swedish officers within the unit. During the summer of 1943, two veterans from of the *'Wiking' Division,* **Gösta Borg** (b. 1915) and **Heino Meyer** (b. 1923), ran into each other. **Meyer** had been sent home a few weeks earlier following recovery from an injury sustained in October 1942. **Borg**, on the other hand, returned in 1941 to resume his military career.[91] Having made the decision to re-join the *SS* in mid-September 1943, they travelled to Norway to sign their enlistment contracts on 2 October. Sixteen days later, they began their training as officers candidates within the *3. Lehrgang für Germanische Offiziere* at Bad Tölz. Participating in the same course was also the Swedish-born **Rune Ahlgren** (b. 1917), who had previously served on the Hanko Front in 1941.[92] A soldier since 1938, he left Sweden illegally in July 1943, but had

84 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)
85 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
86 For example, Ragnar Johansson II is listed as serving in the *11./Rgt.* "*Norge*" as *SS-Panzergrenadier*, where he was awarded the war Merit Cross 2nd Class on 12.1.44. (Copy in Author's archive)
87 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)
88 Ibid.
89 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA), and document from Bengt Hassler's Lehrgang at Bad Tölz. (NARA/BDC)
90 Sonderverteiler 9 Kriegsjunkerlehrgang, Bad Tölz. 30.7.43. (Author's archive)
91 See the chapter on Swedish war correspondents for further information about Borg.
92 Service record from Finland. Rune Ahlgren (KrA) and Service record from Sweden. Rune Ahlgren (KrA)

previously expressed interest in joining the *Waffen-SS* during a visit to the German Consulate in Stockholm in September 1942.[93]

Simultaneously, the *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* commenced at Bad Tölz; three more Swedes would participate: **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez,** who had previously served with *Regiment* '*Norge*', **Torkel Tillman** (b. 1917) and **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** (b. 1916).[94] All three were so-called '*Swede-Germans*' with dual citizenship. The courses continued until graduation in March 1944. Of six Swedish officers' candidates, three would see service with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*.

Departure from Grafenwöhr for Croatia

The order to entrain *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps* to Croatia for further training came in early August 1943. Corps commander **Steiner** had urged a deployment somewhere close to the Eastern Front, as the formation contained a large number of European volunteers who wished to fight against the Red Army. The corps staff entrained for Agram on 28 August. It was followed by '*Nordland*' *Division* and the '*Nederland*' *Brigade* a few days later.

Somberg returned to Grafenwöhr while the Corps was preparing to depart. He would, however, not join them being as he was sent to the *SS-Waffentechnicher Lehranstalt Dachau* (weapons technician school).[95]

Sven Alm and **Rune Wikström** were still participating in their basic training when the Corps departed for Croatia. It would take some months before they joined their Swedish comrades at the front.[96] Yet another volunteer who would eventually serve with the corps enlisted at this time. **John Wahlström,** a 20-year-old *SSS* member from Stockholm, had been working as a lumberjack when he left his forest camp with a companion on 6 August.[97] Employed for just two months, they requested leave to visit a nearby city. Prior to their return, **Wahlström** informed his friend that he planned to continue to Norway and asked that his belongings be posted to his parents. Having previously prepared by studying maps, packing a few belongings and burning letters, his father remained clueless, but had received a vague letter stating, without reason, that his son would travel to Norway. **Wahlström's** father wanted to know what measures could be taken by the authorities and requested that the matter should be dealt with discreetly. He would never see his son again.[98]

In September 1943, Swedish volunteer **Charles Lindberg** (b. 1922), an *SSS* member who joined the *SS* during May 1943 was sent to Sennheim Camp.[99] He left Sweden for Finland to join the *Swedish Volunteer Company*, but instead deserted in Finland to enlist with the *SS*. Not much is known about his service, as the Swedish police never properly investigated the case.[100] It is known, however, that he had served in Finland during 1941. Badly wounded in the head and legs by a mine, he was sent home, after which he tried to re-enlist the Finnish volunteers in March 1942.

93 25 August 1943 P.M. to case XII 83 Ä. 2261. (MUST). Service record for Rune Ahlgren (KrA)
94 List of graduates of 11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang (NARA)
95 Interrogation of Jacob Ingmar Somberg. 29.12.45. P6338. (RA)
96 Letter to Sven Alm, addressed to the Sennheim camp. 27.9.43. G.akt 140:161. (RA)
97 XII 83 Ä2268 tapped phone conversation between "S.S.S. Olov" to "Hans-Göran". 10.3.43 (RA) and P.M. Falun 17.8.43, XII 83 Ä2268. (RA)
98 P.M. Falun 17.8.43, XII 83 Ä2268. (RA)
99 Letter from Charles Pontus Lindberg, 23.9.43. XII83/Ä 848. (RA)
100 From the Finnish Volunteer Agency to Criminal Commisar W. Magnusson, the police, Stockholm. 10.7.43. XII 83/Ä 848. (RA)

The previously sustained injuries led to complications and he was sent home. The head injury, according to his father, affected his thinking.[101]

It also remains uncertain whether or not **Erik Wallin** departed with the Corps to Croatia. In a letter to his mother dated 20 August 1943 he related he had been hospitalized.[102] It is possible he made a quick recovery and rejoined his comrades, but he may also have been recovering during the active operations in Croatia. Some sources claim he was wounded whilst fighting against partisans and, according to personal letters written during August and October 1943, he was stationed with a replacement unit in Breslau. If this has any connection to his being hospitalized or with a later injury remains unknown. These letters also contain complaints that he did not receive a single reply from home. **Wallin** also thought about seeking leave to Norway, and expressed the wish that his mother would come to visit.[103] However, it should be noted that not only might he have served in a replacement battalion, but could also have been stationed as a temporary guard at '*Gross-Rosen'* concentration camp This accusation, something he failed to mention during his police interrogation, first appeared in a left wing news-paper article in 1945. However, according to at least two individuals who knew him personally, he readily confirmed this after the war.[104] Still, no solid proof exists, but the city of Breslau, where his replacement unit had their training camp, is just one hour's drive from *Gross-Rosen*.

CROATIA (SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1943)

The situation in Croatia was not as calm as the volunteers had been led to expect. The men of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps* were to be committed to more training, but increased partisan activity and resultant participation in an escalating dirty war that would cause great suffering to the civilian population. One should note that it was common in German documents to record everyone killed during anti-partisan sweeps as "partisans", even if the victims never held a gun in their hands. Partisan attacks were well-planned and organised and, in addition to targeting the newly-arrived panzer corps, would also strike at other German formations and Croatian *Ustaša* outfits. During this period, two major partisan operations took place: from 1 September to the 4 October 1943 the 'Fighting in the Karlovac-Kordun Area at the Time of the Italian Capitulation' and the 'Autumn Winter Operations', which terminated in December 1943.

III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps reached Croatia in early September. The *'Nordland' Division,* in which the Swedish volunteers served at the time, was placed in the Sisak-Glina-Bosnisch-Nowi area where it engaged with partisan groups almost immediately. The divisional staff was situated at Sisak, together with the battalion staff of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. The battalion, although officially designated a motorized reconnaissance unit, primarily operated as infantry for lack of necessary vehicles. It consisted of five companies; the first two organised as armoured reconnaissance companies; the third and fourth as *Panzergrenadier* companies, the last, No. 5, being the designated heavy company equipped with halftracks armed with mounted 75mm guns and conventional, towed anti-tank guns, portable infantry cannons and a platoon of pioneers.

Although no Swedish fatalities occurred in Croatia, several volunteers would desert to the partisans. **Pehrsson,** who served as platoon leader in the 3./*SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* was commissioned

101 Document about the concerns from Lindberg's brother and father that he was planning to enlist in the *SS*. 9.4.42. XII 83/Ä 848. (RA)

102 Letter from Erik Wallin. 20.8.43. (Author's archive)

103 Letters from Erik Wallin. 16.9.43, 26.9.43 and 12.10.43. (Author's archive)

104 Information from Bo B. and Erik R. who was told about the KZ-service by Erik Wallin. (Unknown date)

3rd Company in Croatia. To the far right is Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. (Lennart Westberg)

(*SS-Untersturmführer*) on 1 September 1943. **Walther Nilsson** and **Karl-Martin Ågrahn** were also serving in the same company as NCOs.

On 8 September the corps received news of the Italian capitulation. It was immediately put on 'alert' status and parts of *'Nordland',* supported by detached units of *'Wiking',* set out to disarm an Italian armoured division. The confiscated vehicles were put into use by the *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 11* for training purposes.

German units were not alone in the race to disarm their former allied. Partisan groups also hurried to seize large quantities of weapons and territory formally held by the Italians. This competition continued until the end of September. The partisans, thus armed and strengthened, began to draw up plans to drive occupying German and Croatian units from the country.

German forces, in the days following the unexpected Italian capitulation, launched several successful enterprises to occupy their previously abandoned positions. Small skirmishes occurred, and on 13 September *I./Rgt 'Danmark'* received a report stating that two soldiers of its men had been captured. A squad was dispatched, but the attempt to free the prisoners was, with three men including a *SS-Oberscharführer* killed in action, completely unsuccessful.[105]

The First Swedish Deserters (Croatia 1943)

By late September, several Swedes had deserted to the partisans. According to a surviving corps document, at least two volunteers went over to the enemy by 20 September.[106] Their identity is not related, but at least five Swedish volunteers would desert. One of them, **Karl-Martin Ågrahn,** was wounded by the German military police and imprisoned.[107] He was, following recovery in Vienna, transferred to Finland, and from there deserted a second time. He was the first volunteer

105 Bataillonsbefehl 27.11.1943. (Predrag B. archive)
106 Document from Gen.Kdo *III. Germ. SS-Pz.Korps* IIA, 20.09.43. (Author's archive)
107 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)

of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* to return home. During subsequent interrogation by the Swedish police, he left a valuable testimony.

Ågrahn claimed to have been posted to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* with the rank of *SS-Oberscharführer* and platoon leader and fought with the former unit until wounded in Italy.[108] This last disclosure is of course untrue as the unit never saw service in Italy. Of more interest is the information related about other volunteers. **Stig Olsén,** according to **Ågrahn,** who spoke Russian fluently, deserted to the partisans with **Tage Lindborg**. **Ågrahn** was well aware that the latter had been a communist, as he had been told so by the Swedish platoon leader **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson.** The former, however, was probably unaware of the fact that **Olsén** was suspected by the Swedish police of communist sympathies as well.

According to **Erik Wallin**, **Lars Hellmér** also chose to desert.[109] This was reported in September 1943.[110] The last Swede, according to **Ågrahn**, to desert – not to the partisans but to British troops in Italy – was **Carl-Erik Isgrén** if this can be believed. It is more likely that also he deserted to the partisans.[111] It remains uncertain whether or not the volunteers planned to desert together, but **Jan Dufwa,** who had been sent home from Klagenfurt, claimed this was the case.[112] The Swedish police had no chance to investigate the matter further. **Ågrahn** was the sole Swedish deserter who managed to return home during this period. The remainder – probably executed by the partisans – are listed as missing in action.[113]

The inhospitable local climate, in addition to gruelling anti-partisan operations, proved stressful for the Swedish volunteers. **Karl-Olof Holm** wrote that the climate was tough and it was forbidden to drink the water, as several soldiers, himself included, had suffered from dysentery. Although he had been promoted to *SS-Rottenführer,* he was by now longing to return home after spending just a few months with the *SS*: "I hardly understand what got into me when I left home". This prevailing homesickness would have dire personal consequences in the near future.[114]

It is clear that the fighting spirit of the Swedish volunteers was low. In addition to those who deserted, several volunteers in the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, including **Knut Fagerström** and **John-Erik Eriksson,** requested immediate discharge. Their applications reached the battalion commander (***SS-Hauptsturmführer*** **Rudolf Saalbach**) who refused to submit them to higher authorities. Instead, they were turned over to ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson,** who at first tried to dissuade them. All appeals having proved futile, he instead kept their applications and promised that he would personally execute anyone who attempted to escape.[115]

John-Erik Eriksson was, however, granted leave to Berlin in September 1943. Here he planned to marry the mother of his child. Whilst there, he chanced a visit to the Swedish military attaché and, with his assistance, once again requested an immediate resignation. It would be one year before he was allowed to return home.[116]

108 Karl-Martin Ågrahn: Correspondence with Swedish police concerning his service with the *Waffen-SS*, 20.12.43. P5642. (RA)

109 Information from Erik Stig Wallin to Swedish police concerning Swedish volunteers, 19.7.45. (RA)

110 Telegram from *SS-Führungshauptamt*. Berlin. 5.4.44. (Author's archive)

111 Lists of Swedish volunteers from Karl-Martin Ågrahn 13.12.43. P5642 (RA) and Information from Erik Stig Wallin to the Swedish police concerning other Swedish volunteers, 19.7.45. (RA)

112 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)

113 Compilation from 11/12 1943. 8.10.54. P4702. (RA)

114 Letter from Karl-Olof Holm, 22.10.43. (Author's archive)

115 Interrogation of John Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA) and Interrogation with Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)

116 Interrogation of John Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA)

John-Erik Eriksson, who served with the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* in Croatia. (Martin Månsson)

On 22 September, *I./Rgt. 'Danmark'*, which was occupying Glina, was surrounded. The besieging partisans, however, pulled back the following day and communications were re-established with neighbouring German units. A few days later, the partisans proposed a prisoner exchange. Two Danish officers escorted several partisans captives who were traded for *SS* prisoners. The exchange, during which the former were subjected to violent profanities and spitting, occurred at a remote partisan camp.[117]

The *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* deployed nearer to active partisan areas on 11 October, with the *2.* and *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* going into position at Topolowitsch where they underwent further training. This was halted four days later when they were put on high alert: a nearby railway station had been blown to pieces by partisans.[118]

The corps' units, in addition to anti-partisan activities, continued training. On 21 October, *I./Rgt. 'Danmark'* conducted an exercise at Glina that caused panic and confusion amongst the civil population. Shortly after, explosions were heard outside the town as the partisans attacked a German company several kilometres away.[119] On the evening of the following day, *1./Rgt. 'Norge'* was subjected to an attack of eight hours duration.[120] The persistent enemy occupied a village to the north of *I./Rgt. 'Danmark'* the following day. The unit, having driven the attackers back, returned to the village with one recorded fatality.

The *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, ordered into combat readiness 24 October, moved 40 km downstream of the River Save. They met little resistance as they stormed a partisan camp which at the time housed just two enemy 'soldiers'.

It is clear, despite the fact that few details are known about the Croatian operations, that the Nordic volunteers were caught-up in a so-called 'dirty war'. On 26 October, a total of four villages were burned to the ground by occupying German forces; 100 partisans were recorded as killed.[121]

117 *Danske soldater i kamp på östfronten 1941-1945*, p.148,
118 Tieke, pp. 10 ff.
119 *Danske soldater i kamp på östfronten 1941-1945*, p.148.
120 *Dagbok frå ein rotnorsk nazist*, p.160.
121 *Dagbok frå ein rotnorsk nazist*, p.163.

A similar action took place at the end of October. *I./Rgt. 'Norge'* was in pursuit of a partisan force when they reached a village from which they received fire. In response, they began clearing the village house by house, placing the barrels of their guns through windows and doors and opening fire on what turned out to be sheltering women, children and elderly people. The entire village was in flames when the battalion withdrew.[122] According to a letter written by Danish *SS* officer **Per Sörensen –** first published in the book *Östfronten – Danskere i Krig* – a similar incident occurred in October 1943. His company had been ordered to locate an enemy munitions dump in a village between Petrinja and Sisak. The village in question was inhabited by civilians. Nonetheless, after receiving fire from two young boys, the Danish soldiers turned back, and burned the village to the ground without taking any prisoners. As noted, most of the Swedish volunteers fought with the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* or *Rgt. 'Norge'* while in the *'Nordland' Division*. There is however one volunteer, whose nationality has not been fully established – ***SS-Sturmmann* Armand Johansson**, who not only mentions to have fought with *Rgt. 'Danmark'*, but also in the first company of the Regiment, which was commanded by the previously mentioned **Per Sörensen**. In an interrogation with the Swedish police, he mentions that **Sörensen** was his company commander, and that he participated in anti-partisan warfare in Croatia. The debate over his nationality is because he might have been a Danish volunteer. Born in Denmark, **Johansson** was the son of a German mother and a Swedish father, and thus claimed Swedish citizenship. The Swedish government, nonetheless, considered him to be a Danish citizen. He nevertheless deserves to be mentioned because of his ancestry. This is especially true when one considers that Estonian-Swedes are also mentioned in the text.[123] It is more than likely **Johansson** participated in reprisal described by **Sörensen.**

The Battalion received its first issue of vehicles at the start of November, the first being delivered to *2.* and *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. These lacked the necessary communications equipment. The second company was to become the first of five companies to be issued their on-paper vehicle complement. It was almost up to full strength by the middle of the month. Partisans attacks continued as Balkan service drew to a close.[124] **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** left the company on 12 November, in order to participate in a gas protection course at Bromberg.[125]

III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps was subsequently to be relieved by the *367. Infanterie Division* and the *1. Kosaken-Kavallerie-Division*. It would, however, be another few weeks before this was completed. Meanwhile, *'Nordland' Division* suffered further losses. On 17 November, a column of vehicles was ambushed with 30 killed and 20 wounded. *I./Rgt. 'Danmark'* was ambushed that same day with a loss of one killed and nine wounded. Two more ambushes, killing and wounding approximately 110 men from other corps' units, occurred on 19 November.[126]

Rgt. 'Danmark' found itself hard-pressed throughout this period; *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* had to be sent out on rescue mission when a component squad was cut-off. ***SS-Oberscharführer* Walther Nilsson** distinguished himself during this action.[127] Partisan activity also increased along the railway to Agram where several bridges were blown up. It was during these fateful November days that *5./Rgt. 'Danmark'* would be totally annihilated.

122 Ibid, pp. 166 ff.

123 P.M. concerning Danish citizen Armand Kaj Johansson, born 10 June 1923. 7.10.52. Ä3431. (RA)

124 Poller, p. 39.

125 H-G. Pehrsson correspondence with King Gustaf V concerning further service with the Swedish army. Undated. (Author's archive)

126 *ČKNJ*, p. 225, *Osma kordunaška udarna divizija*, p. 788 and *Danske soldater i kamp på östfronten 1941-1945*, p. 149.

127 Poller, p. 42.

Officers of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* in Croatia, October 1943. From left to right: Georg Erichsen (Battalion adjutant), Rudolf Saalbach (Battalion Commander), Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, Siegfried Lorenz. (Lennart Westberg)

The Battle of Hrastovica and the Annihilation of *5./Rgt. 'Danmark'*

The small isolated mountain village of Hrastovica had only been occupied since the summer of 1943. The local rail system, the roads being unpaved, was the only means of resupply for the village garrison, thus a nearby railway bridge had to be defended if the line was to remain open.

The village was, by late November, held by *5./Rgt. Danmark,* which had recently relieved *7./Rgt. 'Danmark'*. The latter's outgoing companies had experienced a relatively quiet period. The situation would be entirely different for the incoming 5th Company. The first blow fell on the night of 23/24 November 1943. This attack was soon repulsed. The next assault, which managed to cut off the village, occurred the following day.

An attempted German relief expedition failed on the 26th. The besieged *SS* troops, realizing that further resistance was useless, finally capitulated after a desperate defence. The exact number of causalities remains uncertain; some sources state that total losses amounted to 100 killed, 16 wounded and 60 prisoners. The corps' official casualty report confirmed 61 killed, of which two were officers and nine NCOs. A small group managed to make their way out of the besieged village and return to Petrinja.

Swedish Liaison Officer: *SS-Untersturmführer* Gunnar Eklöf

Whilst the panzer corps fought against partisans in Croatia, **Gunnar Eklöf**, who had studied at Bad Tölz with **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson,** was home on leave; his visit to Sweden would create some controversy. Having left the country in 1941, he had forgone his military service. Returning home twice dressed in his *SS* uniform, the authorities failed to take action. The third period of leave provided opportunity to visit an uncle who resided close to a military airfield. Accused of being a spy, he was arrested but eventually freed. The left-wing press would elevate the incident to a *cause*

célèbre. One journal went so far as to accuse **Eklöf** of having participated in the Final Solution by claiming he had participated in a mass shooting of Polsih Jews. This was vehemently denied in a letter published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*.[128]

Eklöf was appointed to liaison officer of the Swedish volunteers within the *Generalkommando der III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* in November 1943. He would, as part of his assignment, mail gift packages to Swedes serving at the front and provide assistance in their dealings with German authorities.[129] In this unique role, **Eklöf** managed to make himself unpopular with his countrymen. **Sten Eriksson** contacted him after being wounded on the Eastern Front. Dispatched to a training camp at Ellwangen after recovery, he, along with several comrades, was detained without cause. After many weeks of mundane service, interrupted by a three-day stint during which they guarded prisoners from a concentration camp, **Eriksson** wrote **Eklöf** with a request to be sent to the front or be granted discharge. This plea was met with derision and a reminder that the latter would be keeping an eye on the disgruntled volunteer in the future.[130] **Eriksson** was subsequently posted to Finland.

Another Swedish national who maintained contact between the volunteers and home was **Thorolf Hillblad,** head of the *SSS* headquarters (*Ortsgruppe Berlin*) in the German capitol. Forgotten by the party leadership, **Hillblad** gave vent to his frustrations in a lengthy correspondence about the whereabouts of dispatched party literature destined for volunteers at the front. On 12 November 1943 he sent a preliminary report concerning Swedes in the *Waffen-SS* to the staff of the Sveaborg organization. Serving under the command of ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Pehrsson** in the 3./*SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were, according to **Hillblad**, the following:

Grönman, Anders	Pettersson, Stig
Åkerman, Lars	Eriksson, (John-)Erik
Brandt, Oscar	Holm, Karl(-Olof)
Kerras, Edgar	Pehrsson, (Karl-)Erik
Brandt, Arthur	Berg, Nils
Molin, Sigurd	Wikström, Rune
Bergström, Anders	Fagerström, Knut
Sundberg, Sigfrid	Alm, Sven
Österberg, Johan	Westrin, Johan
Kornblom, Lars	Nilsson, Walther
Söderholm, Gunnar	Ahlberg, Axel
Söderholm, Elmar	Johansson (Somberg), Ingmar
Tomsson, Harald	Lindström, Emil
(Estonian Swedes)	Johansson, Ragnar
	Pehrsson, (Hans-)Gösta
	(Swedish nationals)

Related attachments to other units were as follows:

Wikström, Bo [*'Wiking'*]
Wallin, Erik [probably *Rgt. 'Norge'* or Breslautraining camp]

128 P.M. concerning Erik Gunnar Eklöf, (5/10 1943. Cederholm-Fagerström) P3592 (RA) and several clippings from left-wing newspapers found in his security police folder, P3592. (RA).
129 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf. 8.10.45. P3592. (RA)
130 Poller, pp. 89-91.

Eriksson, Sten [Waiting for transferral to the corps]
Bergstrand, Thord [*'Wiking'*]
Nordqvist, Sven [Waiting for transferral to the corps]
Stawåsen, Gösta [Recovering in hospital]

Also listed were five volunteers participating in officer training at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz*. Even if this list is, to some extent, incorrect i.e., Estonian-Swedes described as Swedish nationals and vice-versa, individuals associated with the wrong units, etc., it provides a tangible figure of the number of Swedes serving with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* at an early date, so the report is more than likely correct.[131] **Hillblad** was not the only one to write angry correspondence to the *SSS* party and organisation Sveaborg. **Sten Eriksson**, in a letter dated 21 January 1944, noted that he had sent off a membership application and fee, but had not received any confirmation and the Swedes, who by then served at the training camp in Ellwangen, were the only volunteers who had not received a party Christmas greeting. He ended this letter with complaint against the equally irritated **Hillblad**.[132]

Departure for the Eastern Front

On 27 November, the first units of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* entrained for the Eastern Front. *2./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* by far the best equipped company, was chosen to act as rearguard. The first Cossacks arrived in Glina to relieve *'Nordland' Division* on the 28th.[133] *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* held a farewell party at Topolowitsch before the last company, *2./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* began the long rail journey to the 'Oranienbaum Pocket' outside Leningrad on 8 December. *SS-Pz-Abt 11'Hermann von Salza'* and *4. SS-Panzergrenadier-Brigade 'Nederland'* were the last units to entrain in late December.[134]

A rare photo of Estonian-Swede Lars Kornblom who served with the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* (Göran Hargestam)

131 Letter from Thorolf Hillblad, SSS-Berlin to Sveaborg staff, Stockholm. 12.11.43. (Author's archive)
132 Letter from Sten Folke Eriksson to Sveaborg staff, Stockhom. 21.1.44. (RA)
133 T315 / R2281 / F000290. (NARA)
134 Tieke, p. 12.

ARRIVAL AT THE EASTERN FRONT AND TURN OF YEAR 1943-44

The front was relatively calm on arrival in the Oranienbaum Pocket. Soviet leaflets announcing a large-scale offensive – due to commence on14 January 1944 – had been dropped on the beleaguered garrison. The sector had been relatively inactive since the encirclement of Leningrad in 1941. Activity around the pocket, situated due west of Leningrad, consisted mostly of patrol and sniper activity. Two inexperienced *Luftwaffe Feld-Divisionen* were responsible for the sector. The corps was thus shifted there to support *18. Armee* against the forewarned enemy attack. On 13 December it took responsibility for the pocket from the mouth of the Luga River to Peterhof.[135]

SS-Sturmann Armand Johansson, who served in *1./Rgt. 'Danmark',* was granted leave shortly after reaching the Oranienbaum front. Disenchanted with National Socialism, he abandoned uniform, weapons and equipment and, with assistance, fled to Sweden.[136] Classified as Danish by the Swedish state, he still claimed Swedish citizenship as his father had been a Swedish citizen. Granted asylum during the post-war years, he was never extradited to Denmark, where charges of treason would have been faced.[137]

The prevailing calm was set aside for training and preparations, positions were to be improved and the besiegers familiarized themselves with the terrain. Some missing equipment arrived, including vehicles for *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* Its 5th Company received cannon but was short of ammunition and radio equipment. Everything was in readiness for what was to come. Although *'Nordland' Division* had originally been designated as a *'Nordic' Division*, its replacement personnel were mostly so-called *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans from Siebenbürgen, Hungary and Romania.[138] However, some of the replacements for *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were Swedish. One of these, **Erik Wallin**, had served with the *Rgt. 'Norge'* during the early stages of corps formation. He returned to active service in winter 1943-44, and was assigned to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, or at least he claimed to have done so during subsequent interrogations in 1945.[139] It seems he was wounded again shortly after; his security police folder stating that he was wounded three times. It is possible, considering he was on leave in Berlin in February 1944, he was wounded during January and sent there to recover. He also claimed, in a short post-war biography, that he rejoined the company about April-May 1944.[140] It is also possible that the peripatetic Estonian-Swede fought in Croatia with another divisional unit, but joined the Battalion at *Oranienbaum*.[141] Volunteer **Edgar Kärras**, however, claimed to have been posted to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* since Croatia, but without participating in any combat against partisans.[142] **Frans Wahlberg** made an opposite claim during interrogation and added he was transferred to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* on arrival at Oranienbaum in December 1943. But, as noted earlier, having undergone interrogation following release from a Soviet prison camp in 1946, his statements were, more often than not, confused and untrustworthy.[143] **Sven Alm** and **Rune Wikström** joined the company in December after

135 Tieke, p. 21 ff.
136 Report concerning Johansson, Armand Kaj, 3 January 1944. Ä3431. (RA)
137 Ibid.
138 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
139 Interrogation of Erik Stig Wallin, 23.7.45. (RA)
140 Short autobiography written by Erik Wallin. Undated. (Author's archive)
141 One Estonian Swede related to author Lennart Westberg in 1995 that 'after training in Croatia during the fall of 1943, I and the other came to an armoured reconnaissance company which was positioned between Leningrad and Narwa'. (Gyllenhaal/Westberg, p.293)
142 Interview with Edgar Kärras, Stockholm. 26.11.83. (Author's archive)
143 Interrogation of Frans Wahlberg, 1.6.46. P4820. (RA)

SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. Possibly taken in the Oranienbaum pocket. (Author's archive)

completion of training, the former claiming he went into action as half-track group commander.[144] Approximately one month later, **Ingmar Somberg** joined the Battalion as a staff weapons technician, but would later be transferred to the Swedes in 3rd Company.[145] During the actions in Croatia, he had been sent off to acquire half-tracks in Macedonia. The mission having failed, he returned empty-handed to Oranienbaum.[146] On 24 December, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** resumed the role of platoon leader after completing an anti-gas course.[147] In total, as noted by the corps' *IIa*, *'Nordland' Division* had 39 Swedish and Estonian Swedes on its roster. The breakdown was as follows: 1 officer, 5 NCO and 33 enlisted men.[148]

The training continued as the date of the anticipated Soviet offensive neared. One can only imagine what passed through the minds of the men of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* on the night of 13 January 1944.

144 Report Saturday 7.4.45 concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. G-akt 140:161. (RA)
145 Interrogation of Jacob Ingmar Johansson Somberg. 29.12.45. P6338. (RA)
146 Ibid.
147 Letter from H-G. Pehrsson to King Gustaf V concerning further service in the Swedish army. Post-war. (Author's archive)
148 Document IIa *III. (Germ.) SS-Pz-Korps*. (PK archive)

All Hell Breaks Loose

Just as announced, the Soviet offensive commenced early on the morning of 14 January 1944. Following a heavy artillery barrage lasting 65 minutes, Soviet divisions stormed defences held by the inexperienced *9.* and *10. Luftwaffe-Feld-Divisionen* and broke through almost immediately. The main thrust struck the divisional boundaries, and ripped open a 5 kilometre breach in the German line.[149] Moving forward through retreating and panic-stricken *Luftwaffe* personnel, *SS-Pionier-Btl 11* managed to halt the enemy on their front. The failure of neighbouring units to hold out on the right and left flanks, however, forced them to retire. The staff of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* soon realized the situation was critical; the assault reserve was therefore committed. Amongst its disparate units was *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, which moved from a designated staging area – where it had been situated since 31 December – eastwards via Kljasina and Star Bor. *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* pressed on towards the north-east, to take up positions about Kosheritsy. On the evening of 14 January it attacked northwards, towards Zherebjatki. The assault was halted with the loss of three half-tracks.[150]

The first company commander, according to **Pehrsson**, was killed that very day, after which he took charge of the leaderless company. This claim is quite interesting when one considers the first company officer fatality, as related in the available post-war literature – was **Walther Kaiser –** who was killed in April 1944. According to **Pehrsson**, however, it is possible that another officer led the company during the initial stages of the Oranienbaum fighting. **Kaiser** was wounded during the same period and in the compiled casualty report is listed as platoon leader. It seems quite evident that another officer seems led the company at this time. Nevertheless, the exact command structure of 3rd Company remains uncertain.[151] The Battalion was often split up during this period, as individual companies and platoons made their way out of encirclement.[152] **Pehrsson**, when interviewed by a Norwegian *SS-Kriegsberichter* in 1944, related an incident that took place in the company together with volunteer **Karl-Olof Holm:**

> It was during an attack that we were encircled – we had been encircled for two nights and were about to fight our way out again. No booze had been given out or food received, and we were pretty damned uncomfortable. In the middle of the attack when we were breaking out, a fellow approached me under a hail of bullets to say: "Does the *Untersturmführer* want a drink?" – What the hell boy, you have a drink? Yes, I found a bottle of brandy in the snow", he said. And it turned out to be a nice bottle of French cognac.[153]

The reality of war, despite this joyful incident, would soon rear its brutal face: on 16 January, the company suffered its first volunteer casualty. **Rune Wikström** went missing 5 kilometres north-east of Kosheritsy. **Nils Berg** later observed:

> Another Swede named Rune Wikström faced an uncertain fate. Fatigue prevent him from keeping up during a retreat. He either died or was captured by the Russians.[154]

149 Tieke, p. 31.
150 War diary of 2nd Soviet Shock Army. (Predrag Blanusa archive)
151 Namentliche Führerverluste *11.SS-Freiw.Panz.Gren.Div.Nordland* für die zeit 14.1.44-20.1.44. (Bundesarchiv)
152 Interview with Edgar Kärras, Stockholm. 26.11.83. (Author's archive)
153 Front recording '*Skandinavischers bunkerabend'*. Original recording from 1944. (Author's archive)
154 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44. (RA)

Rune Wikström, who went missing in action after only two days of active service. (Bosse B. archive)

The exact fate of **Wikström** remains unknown. He is, in addition to five other company members, listed as missing in action that day. The barely 19-year old volunteer had participated in active fighting for a mere two days. The desperate combat that raged that day is revealed in the war diary entries of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army, which included intercepted German radio messages. A German unit around Kosheritsy, possibly the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, transmitted the following message between 11.25 – 11.35 hours, Moscow time:

> 11.25: Stalin Organ bombardment in Bruno (Kosheritsy) area; positions heavily damaged, two machine-gun positions withdrawn. Requesting reinforcements. Hurry up!
> 11:30 Attack. Requesting fire-support in Bruno area. Requesting armoured support.
> 11:35 Order: Holdin area with the unit. Meanwhile, counting only on armoured support.[155]

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson became a casualty on the following day. He was shot in the right arm while standing in a foxhole together with **Karl-Olof Holm**. The latter dressed his wounds prior to evacuation. **Pehrsson,** according to **Holm**, was by then serving as platoon commander, and not, as claimed by himself, company commander.[156] Evacuated to a field hospital in Dorpat, he remained there convalescing until March 1944.[157] From 17-21 January, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was in action at Alt-Bor. Desperate defensive battles raged and by 24 January it was clear the enemy's offensive was aimed at Wolossovo and Narwa.[158] On the same day, the Battalion was ordered into action against

155 War diary of Soviet 2nd Shock Army. 16.1.44. (Predrag Blanusa archive)
156 Letter from Karl-Olof Holm. 14.3.44. (Author's archive)
157 Interrogation of Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)
158 Poller, p.57.

a Soviet strongpoint and assembly position at Chjulgjusi.[159] The unit was reinforced with army troops and split into two *Kampfgruppen*. Advancing from the south, *Kampfgruppe 'S'* (commanded by ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Heckmüller**) consisted of *3./SS-Pz-Aukl-Abt 11* and 2nd Company. Encountering fierce resistance, the counter-attack bogged down in heavy fighting before some small territorial gains were made. Advancing from the north, *Kampfgruppe 'N'* (commanded by ***SS-Hauptsturmführer*** **Saalbach)** gained a temporary local advantage. After clearing the village of enemy troops, both *Kampfgruppen* pulled back. Their casualties amounted to a small number of wounded. The volunteers' luck changed two days later when platoon leader ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Walther Nilsson**, who had served with the company since Croatia, was killed – blown to pieces – during a 'Stalin Organ' attack. German ***SS-Unterscharführer*** **Hans Fuchs** was also killed by the same barrage. **Nilsson**, it was later claimed in several wartime articles, was viewed as one of the finest volunteers.

That same day, the Battalion participated in the armoured battle at Gubanizy. The unit was absorbed by *Kampfgruppe 'Wengler'* of *227. Infanterie-Division* and was in a road block position on the road north of Wolossovo. A number of men from the Battalion would earn medals during the fight there. The enemy charged with a tank brigade consisting of a total of 54 tanks plus supporting infantry. The Battalion engaged the attackers at all critical points, whilst commander **Saalbach** directed the battle from the main line of resistance.[160] The western approaches to the town were covered by **Siegfrid Lorenz** and his company managed to repel the enemy despite heavy losses. These efforts ensured that the only supply route to the hard-pressed *Kampfgruppe* '*Wengler*' remained open.[161] The defenders faced the assault without any artillery support; the available heavy weapons deployed coming from 5th (Heavy) Company led by **George Langendorf** who assumed command as his predecessor, **Schmidt**, was wounded on 15 January. Most of the enemy tanks were T-34s, supported by approximately 350 infantry. Eight enemy tanks were knocked out by two supporting *Sturmgeschütze* at the start of the battle. Short of ammunition, they had to pull back. **Langendorf's** heavy company was thus left with the responsibility of engaging the enemy armour. 34 – 28 of which were T-34s – of 54 tanks were put out of action during the subsequent fighting.[162] ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Caspar Sporck,** a Netherlands volunteer serving in *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* knocked out 11 tanks by fearlessly charging them with his half-track to engage his 75mm short-barrelled cannon at close range. Similar deeds would earn him the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.[163] Orders for *18. Armee* to withdraw arrived the same day; *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* started began to retire towards the Luga Line.

The following day, 27 January, the Battalion was deployed at Rogowizy. **Saalbach** was once again at the sharp end when the enemy managed to breach the main line of resistance. Quickly gathering his men, the gallant commander personally led a counter-attack which restored the situation after savage fighting.[164] **Lorenz** and his company, deployed to cover an important intersection, held their ground against a numerically superior enemy assault. Holding out against attacks from the north, south and east for three hours, they withdrew some 400 meters to avoid being cut off.[165] **Langendorf's** heavy company knocked out yet another tank that day. **Saalbach** was recommended to receive the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross by none other than ***General*** **Wilhelm Berlin**,

159 Tieke, p. 38.
160 Ritterkreuz vorschlag – Rudolf Saalbach. (Author's archive)
161 DKiG Vorschlag – Siegfrid Lorenz. (Author's archive)
162 Ritterkreuz Vorschlag – George Langendorf. (Author's archive)
163 Poller, p. 60.
164 Ritterkreuz Vorschlag – Rudolf Saalbach. (Author's archive)
165 DKiG Vorschlag – Siegfrid Lorenz. (Author's archive)

Rudolf Saalbach. (Author's archive)

commander of *227. Infanterie-Division*, who claimed that the Battalion's efforts were crucial to the success of the defensive battle.

Casualties mounted in 3rd Company. ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Knut Fagerström** received a shrapnel wound to his right hand on the 27th. Initially diagnosed as a minor wound, he was suffering from blood poisoning within a week and evacuated to hospital. He would be absent for over a month.[166] Another casualty suffered that day occurred during a reconnaissance mission. A troop carrier half-track, supported by an *SdKfz 250/9* with a turret-mounted 20mm automatic cannon, went to investigate a nearby village. The enemy remained silent until the troop carrier began to withdraw, after which it came under heavy fire. To make matters worse, the *SdKfz 250/9* got stuck on snow-covered rocks and had to be abandoned. The crew exited the vehicle, but while rushing to the waiting troop carrier, Estonian-Swede **Arthur Thomson**, (gunner in the *SdKfz 250/9*) was shot through the lung. Subsequently evacuated, he died at the battalion dressing station. He would be the only Estonian-Swede to fall in action with the Battalion.[167] Another casualty was Danish platoon leader **Niels Kryssing**, son of ***SS-Brigadeführer*** **C.P. Kryssing,** who served in *1./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and went missing during a reconnaissance mission. For 3rd Company, casualties in killed, wounded and missing were heavy amongst the German, volunteer and *Volksdeutsche*

166 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)

167 Information provided by Toni Ging, SPW-driver in *3./AA11* published in a veteran publication about the *SS-Pz-AA11*.

soldiers. Company strength was down to just 25 effectives, compared to the officially designated strength of approximately 120 men.[168] During the evening of the 27th, the retreat from Wolossov commenced, *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* retiring westwards to the Gorbovizy-Kirova Line.

The enemy's next objective was the supply route between Begunizy and Narwa. On 28 January they reached Gurlovo. *7./Rgt. 'Danmark'* went into action together with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, then retiring from Wolossovo, to parry this thrust. The attackers' positions were destroyed after two hours' fierce fighting. This unexpected success allowed previously encircled units of *'Nordland' Division* to fall back. The struggle raged on throughout 29 January, the Battalion knocking out several Soviet tanks, two of which were personally credited to company commander **George Langendorf**.

The Corps Arrives at Narwa

According to company commander's orderly, **Frans Bereznyak**, the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* halted outside Narwa on 30 January 1944. The wounding of **Pehrsson** and **Kaiser** and death in combat of ***SS-Oberscharführer* Walther Nilsson** left the battered company with a deficit in junior leaders now filled by ***SS-Unterscharführer* Högg**.[169]

Casualties killed, wounded and missing for *'Nordland' Division during* the fighting retreat to Estonia had been severe. Losses amongst officers for the period 14-20 January were as follows:

> **Platoon Leaders**: 7 killed, 3 missing and 15 wounded including at least 6 severely wounded.
> **Company Commanders**: 8 killed, 24 wounded including at least 10 severely wounded.
> **Battalion Commanders:** 1 killed, 1 missing, 3 wounded including at least 1 severely wounded.
> **Other Officers, doctors, dentists, adjutants, administrative and signal officers:** 2 dead, 4 missing, 10 lightly wounded.[170]

The Soviets wanted to prevent the Germans from establishing a line of defence along the Luga and Narwa rivers. Their first move began with the crossing of the former. This resulted in a desperate corps counter-attack outside Jamburg that was unable to contain the enemy advance. Jamburg fell on 31 January. The only remaining option was to maintain the retreat to the Narwa River defence system or '*Pantherlinie*'.

***SS-Hauptsturmführer* Rudolf Saalbach**, made the following observations concerning the Oranienbaum and Narwa fighting in his after-action report: Co-operation between the Battalion and *10. Luftwaffe-Feld-Division, 61. Infanterie-Division* and the *227. Infanterie-Division* had been poor. This was primarily due to lack of motorization that forced the Battalion to act on its own initiative. Fuel and ammunition delivery had been problematic and a dire shortage of motorcycles and orderly vehicles increased the wear and tear on available half-tracks whose drivers were in need of further education by technical personnel.[171]

168 Ibid. .
169 Poller, p.68.
170 Namentliche Führerverluste *11.SS-Freiw.Panz.Gren.Div.Nordland* für die Zeit 14.1.44-20.1.44. (Bundesarchive)
171 Erfahrungs- und Zustandsbericht. Abt.Gef.Std. den 27.2.44. Gez. Saalbach, *Hauptsturmführer* und Abteilungs kommandeur. P. 1-3. (Petter Kjellander archive)

Vehicles of the *5./SS-Pz.AA11* in the Oranienbaum pocket before the Soviet offensive. (Bosse B. archive)

THE BATTLE OF NARWA (1944)

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 arrived at Narwa following a withdrawal from Jamburg on 31 January 1944. The former was an important Estonian border location which, for propaganda purposes, was of special importance to the *SSS* party. Once the site of an important military victory over the Russians by King Charles XII, Swedish National Socialists viewed the unusually bellicose 18th century monarch as a role model and identified with his stalwart 'Carolingian' soldiers. Narwa was once again destined be the site of another bloody battle, which in post-war literature is often been referred to as 'The Battle of the European *SS*' due to the large amount of foreign volunteers fighting alongside defending German forces.

The Narwa defensive system or *Pantherlinie* existed on paper only and few preparations had been made. The actual defensive line stretched from Hungerburg southwards along the Narwa River to Narwa, where it extended across the eastern bank to the fortified bridgehead at Ssivertsi. This tenuous position included the village of Dolgaja-Niwa before reverting back to the western bank at Kreenholm where it continued southwards.

It was essential for Soviet forces to establish a bridgehead on the western bank and several attempts were made to cross the river between Narwa and Hungerburg. A lodgement was finally established at Kudruküla during the first days of February before it was thrown-back by *Kampfgruppe 'Küste'*. This was followed by another attempt, which struck *SS-Pz-Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza'* (now employed as infantry), at Riigi until forced back by counter-attacks. On 12 February a successful Soviet attack created a breach between Riigi and Ssivertsi on the eastern bank of the river. The bridgehead at Ssivertsi held, but was sealed-off to the west. *III. Germanische SS-Panzer Korps* attempted to eliminate the hostile bridgehead during a series of night attacks that the defenders repelled with heavy loss. Throughout the following days, enemy artillery shells rained down upon the Germans opposite the bridgehead. It was clear the enemy would try to expand the lodgement. This would give them a foothold on the western bank and threaten Narwa.

The enemy, immediately following the creation of the Ssiversti bridgehead, planned to cut-off the Narwa defenders from the remainder of the German forces with a classic pincer movement. This was to be executed by an amphibious operation that took place at Mereküla on 14 February 1944. Opposite the Ssiversti Bridgehead stood parts of the *Rgt. 'Norge'*, assault guns and pioneers from *Nederland-Brigade* and *'Nordland' Division* plus pioneers from *Rgt. 'Danmark'*. The enemy made several attempts to cross the frozen river barrier, but were beaten back with heavy loss. Simultaneously, dominant Soviet positions on the east side foiled all attempts to counter-attack.[172]

The Soviet amphibious operation at Mereküla began on the night of 13/14 February. The coast was primarily defended by coastal artillery, Estonian police battalions and the staff of the *127. Infanterie-Division*. This disparate force was under the command of *Kampfgruppe 'Küste'*. It was not long before some of these units were cut-off by Soviet Marines, At 03.30 hours the situation became clearer to the hard-presses defenders, and contact was re-established with neighbouring units including the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. At 09.00 hours the latter reached the threatened area from the south-east and were committed to action. Within one hour, the Soviet landing force had been crushed leaving behind 300 dead and 200 prisoners. Some sixty additional corpses were counted in the water. These unfortunate men, equipped with special flotation gear for wading ashore, had been so heavily encumbered that they lost balance and drowned in the icy depths.[173]

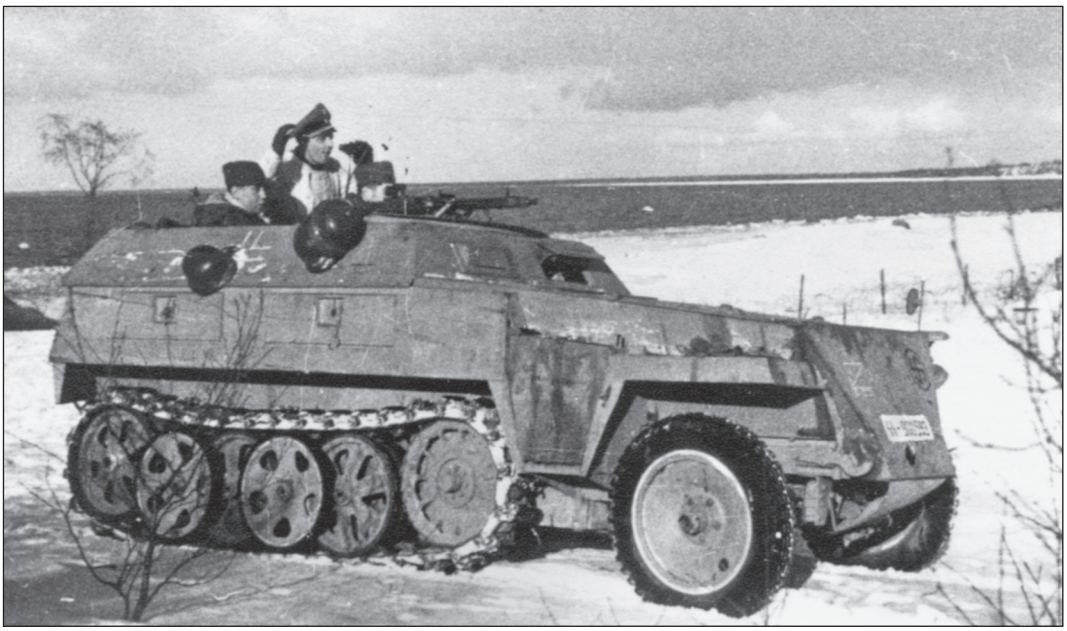
At the same time, the bridgehead at Ssiversti, under continuous pressure from German counter-attacks, was reduced to the area of Vepsküla by 20 February. That same day, the first units of *20. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS* – the Estonian *SS*-Division – arrived and assumed responsibility for the threatened sector. The bridgehead was subsequently destroyed nine days later. Estonian-NCO **Harald Nugiseks** would be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for bravery during this action. Meantime, another Soviet threat was emerging south of Narwa.

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 during the Initial Stages of the Battle of Narwa

As noted, the actions of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and its Swedish volunteer component had been limited during the first month at Narwa, except during the final phase of the Mereküla landing. Having suffered heavy casualties during the retreat from the Oranienbaum Pocket, the embattled unit became a corps asset tasked with conducting mobile operations if required. This assignment also provided time to recover and rebuild. Amongst the personnel transferred to *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps,* were survivors from the *Luftwaffe-Feld-Divisionen* which had been crushed after the breakout from Oranienbaum. Several volunteers were also transferred to the former during spring of 1944 or returned from hospitals. However, the sustained heavy casualties amongst the Swedes (2 killed, one missing and several wounded) had a wholly negative effect on the already low morale of the Swedish volunteers.

John-Erik Eriksson returned to the front following Berlin leave in February. Having failed to marry the mother of his child, he once again had petitioned for a discharge application. It was, his company commander unwilling to grant this, instead decided to dispatch the disaffected volunteer to a training camp at Seelager, Latvia where his case would be reviewed. Assigned to a second-line unit, the temporary hiatus was interrupted when it was re-organised into *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'* – an emergency fighting unit – during summer 1944.[174] **Johan Westrin**, another Swede serving with *'Nordland' Division*, had previously served with *Rgt. 'Norge'* while at Grafenwöhr and later in *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* whilst in or shortly before being sent to Croatia, also left the division.

172 Tieke pp. 55 ff.
173 Ibid, pp. 62 ff.
174 Interrogation ofJohn Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA)



Hans-Gösta Pehrsson on the Estonian coast early 1944. (Lennart Westberg)

Marcus Ledin's photo of a "Swedish" half-track. (Bosse B. archive)

This change more than likely occurred in spring1944. He was subsequently transferred to Latvia and, as with **Eriksson**, ended up being posted to *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'*. The reason for this was enrolment in a nearby NCO course held at Saukenai. As he was a member of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Ausb-u-Ers-Abt*, an armoured reconnaissance training battalion, it is probably correct to surmise that he would have returned to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* at a later date (See Chapter 9 for the remainder of **Eriksson** and **Westrin's** military careers).

Charles Lindberg, who was based at Sennheim Camp during the fall of 1943, returned to Sweden in the middle of February 1944. Upon his return, he applied to be re-employed at the armoured regiment where he had previously served. In his application, he stated he had served with the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and had been in action for about five months. This would mean he had joined the company sometime during the fall of 1943, but the information remains unconfirmed and unfortunately, he was never interrogated about his service.[175]

At the same time **Erik Wallin** visited Berlin during a period of leave, possibly while recovering from a second wound. There, he socialized with the liaison officer **Gunnar Eklöf**, who he had enlisted with in 1943. They miraculously survived a daytime air raid on the underground railway station Flughafen, when an American bomb managed to penetrate the ceiling.[176] Another volunteer he me met up with was **Gösta Stawåsen**, who had fallen ill during training at Grafenwöhr. He had been sent to Berlin in December 1943 in order to receive special treatment. Both volunteers assisted the Swedish ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Sven Rydén** to move to a new flat on Sundgauerstrasse 12. He told them how he was disappointed with the Estonian-Swedes and their lack of fighting spirit, and how he had only managed to recruit a small number of them. **Rydén** wanted to give the impression that he was a very powerful, he hoped Sweden would be conquered by the Reich and "machine-guns would play lengthwise on the streets of Stockholm."[177]

During late February and early March 1944, the threat grew south of Narwa. The Soviet 8th Army managed to create a bridgehead at Krivasso, which would be used as the jumping- off point for further advances northwards; the goal was once again to cut-off all German forces at Narwa. Whilst the Ssiversti Bridgehead was being eliminated during the last days of February, enemy formations were marching northwards after smashing through German defences situated southwards. On the 24 February, Soviet units reached the main railway line to Narwa thus creating the 'West Sack'. That same day, the railway was also cut farther east thus creating 'East Sack'; both breakthroughs seriously threatened the main supply road to Narwa via Tallinn.

On 1 March it was reported that the enemy was strengthening the West Sack by moving several rifle divisions into the sector. That same day, Soviet forces attempted to crush the German forces between the pockets in order to create a single larger pocket. However, the *170. Infanterie-Division* and casualty-reduced companies of *Rgt. "Norge"*, who had participated in the bloody battles around Ssiversti, managed to stall the enemy and force them back. **Ingmar Somberg,** who served in the staff of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* as a weapons technician, received his promotion to *SS-Rottenführer* on the 1 March 1944.[178] This would be his last wartime promotion, but, as he subsequently related, he was actually entitled to a NCO rank for previous participation in NCO course at the weapons technician school at Dachau. The reason he was passed over was a refusal to swear the oath of allegiance to **Adolf Hitler** despite having been ordered to do so several times.[179]

175 Re-employment application, 15.2.44. XII 83/Ä 848. (RA)
176 Wallin, Hillblad, p.166.
177 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)
178 Promotion document for *SS-Sturmmann* Johansson, Ingmar, born 2.10.1924. (Author's archive)
179 Interrogation of Jacob Ingmar Johansson Somberg, 29.12.45. P6338. (RA)

To strengthen the positions of '*Gruppe Berlin',* which held the perimeter of the two 'sacks', the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was added to their forces. Attacks originating from the contested pockets continued throughout the day, but every attempt to breakthrough was halted.[180] The assaults continued over the next few days, with the enemy making several breaches that were repulsed by timely German counter-attacks. In short, the situation was dangerous and both sacks had to be eliminated. The situation at Narwa was also serious and, following the destruction of the bridgehead at Ssiversti, the Red Air Force bombed the city into a smoking pile of rubble during the night of 6/7 March. Following this, the enemy stormed the bridgehead at Popovka – held by the *Rgt. 'General Seyffardt'* of the *'Nederland'-Brigade* – just north of Narwa on the eastern bank of the river.[181] This was followed by an assault towards Lillienbach situated on the same bank. The Soviet assault proved short-lived and they were soon thrown back. The battle of Lillienbach would continue through March; *Rgt. "Danmark"* of *'Nordland' Division* and the *Rgt. 'De Ruyter'* of the *'Nederland'*-brigade would suffer heavy losses.

Gruppe Berlin reported 8 March as an unusually calm day – only a few Soviet probing and reconnaissance units had been encountered and forced back. It was, nonetheless, also suspected that the enemy would attempt to overrun the *170. Infanterie-Division* sometime in the near future. The assumption proved to be correct. At 0800 hours on 9 March, heavy artillery fire rained down on the division's positions southwest of Narwa. After half an hour the firing stopped. This was followed by the relentless advance of four Red Army divisions which forced the hard-pressed defenders to commit their last reserves. Fierce close combat raged, the enemy broke through but was soon subjected to fierce counter-attacks. The beleaguered 1*70. Infanterie-Division* fought desperately, but the enemy managed to cross the 'Joguse Ditch' obstacle with the help of newly-arrived reinforcements. In order to halt the enemy, *II./Grenadier-Regiment 154* and *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were ordered into action. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was ordered to perform blocking and reconnaissance missions north of the Lauka Swamps where they came into contact with the enemy. The attackers managed to create a 400 meter wide breach at the boundary between *I.* and *II./Grenadier-Regiment 154* and stormed forward with two companies; similar breaches quickly developed on other parts of front – the collapsing German defenses were about to tumble like a house of cards.

During the night the enemy brought up reinforcements which was inserted at the Lauka swamp, where they managed to break the lines of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and the *II./Grenadier-Rgt. 154*. The German units had to act quickly in order to hold their ground and decided to launch a series of persistent counter-attacks which succeeded in throwing the enemy back. The German lines had been stretched thinly, and it was decided to pull back the southern flank of the main battle line to the west. This new line would have no respite – on 11 March the enemy threw themselves upon them: the enemy broke through, but just as previously, the Germans managed to close the breaches through counter-attacks. The murderous ding-dong battle continued in the same fashion throughout 12 March with the Soviets continuously, and with heavy artillery support, trying to gain a western breakthrough. Over and over again defending German units were overrun; reserves rushed forward and desperate counter-strokes launched to restore the buckling front despite heavy casualties.

This determined defense forced the Red Army to reconsider and the assaults against *170. Infanterie-Division* was canceled. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and the Swedish volunteers returned to their role as a mobile assault reserve. On the same day as the final Soviet assaults, two officers, **George Langendorf,** commander of the 5th Company and the Battalion commander **Rudolf Saalbach** who was also promoted to *SS-Sturmbannführer*, of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were decorated with the

180 Armeegruppenbefehl Nr.2, 2.3.44, NARA T-312 / 1627 / 000389.

181 Tieke, p. 76.

A number of officers of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* earned high decorations during actions between Narwa and Leningrad. The battalion commander Saalbach (second man from the left) and company commander of the 5th Company, George Langendorf (to the right of Saalbach) received the Knight's Cross. (Petter Kjellander)

Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. A Swede, ***SS-Sturmmann*** **Sven Alm,** also received the Iron Cross Second Class on 14 March. He claimed that he earned the award after single-handedly clearing a Soviet trench system with a submachine-gun; conversely, a comrade claimed it was for rescuing a half-track which otherwise would have been abandoned.[182]

Two more Swedish veterans, wounded during the January retreat, returned to the company: **Knut Fagerström**, who had been recovering from blood poisoning since the beginning of February, returned on 18 March.[183] Back to the unit from hospital convalescence in Dorpat came ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson,** who had been decorated with the Iron Cross First Class during his short recovery period. He resumed his post as platoon commander while the 3rd Company was led by the much-liked German officer **Walther Kaiser,** who had also been wounded during the fighting in January.[184]

The same month, **Wallin** was sent back to the front against his will. The one-year service contract signed in February 1943 had now expired and, with the help of the Swedish military attaché in

182 *Expressen*, 8.7.77. (KB)
183 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
184 Interrogation of Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, 26.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. The badge on his left pocket is the front fighter badge of the DNSAP. In the background is his Schwimmwagen, an amphibious jeep. (Author's archive)

Berlin, he tried, without success, to receive a permit to return home.[185] **Stawåsen,** whom he had socialized with in Berlin, had also made a similar attempt. He would, however, be dispatched to several training camps to receive the coveted discharge papers only to return empty-handed every time. Finally, on gaining leave to Norway, he deserted and returned home in May 1944.[186] Re-acquiring his former communist beliefs, he contacted a left-wing newspaper to relate details about his *SS* volunteer comrades. This act made him something of a traitor in the eyes of the Swedish National Socialists.[187]

Estonian Swedes, unlike most volunteers who were granted Berlin leave only, were usually allowed home leave. This act of beneficence sometimes ensured that leave-takers did not return. One of them, **Edgar Kärras**, served as a driver in *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* Granted leave in April 1944, he never returned.[188] Another volunteer, **Karl-Olof Holm**, wished to return home in spring 1944. In a correspondence with his mother, he noted he would be discharged "as my contract will expire soon and a troop officer will assist me with all the papers".[189] He, too, was unsuccessful, and would never see his mother again.

185 Interrogation of Erik Stig Wallin, 23.7.45. (RA)
186 Report, Thursday 25 May 1944 concerning Gösta Ove Stawåsen. P4465. (RA)
187 Case compilation Hd.866/44. 9.8.44. P4465. (RA)
188 Interview with Edgar Kärras, Stockholm. 26.11.83. (Author's archive)
189 Gyllenhaal, Westberg, p. 287.

***SS-Panzergrenadier* Ragnar Johansson (II)** who served in the *11./Regiment 'Norge'* was transferred to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* sometime during spring 1944.[190] According to **Wallin**, he was initially placed within the company as a dispatch rider, but would later come serve as driver.

On 20 March, the *XXXXIII. Armee-Korps* assumed the responsibility for the sector previously held by *Gruppe Berlin* at the west and east 'sacks'. Plans to eliminate the 'West Sack' commenced shortly after their arrival. The mission fell to *Wehrmacht* officer ***Oberst* Hyazinth Graf von Strachwitz.** Thus the impending operation was codenamed '*Operation Strachwitz*'. Soviet attacks continued, but were repeatedly beaten back by local forces. Finally, on 26 March, the operation commenced. At 06.05 the German batteries began pounding the enemy positions and the *11. Infanterie-Division* soon managed to breakthrough the troublesome 'West Sack' from the southwest. The *227. Infanterie-Division* was also committed to the battle. After four days of heavy fighting, the pocket was eliminated. The Soviets lost two rifle divisions and an infantry regiment, large caches of war material falling into enemy hands.

During April, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was in position north of 'East Sack'. The second *Strachwitz* operation was launched on 6 April 1944. Assaulting from the north, 'East Sack' was destroyed after one day of savage fighting, *2./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* supporting *Panzergrenadier-Division 'Feldherrnhalle'*.[191] The Narwa front war diary noted the following day that the whole of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was subsumed by the division.[192] The second sack thus eliminated, the hostile bridgehead at Kirvasso would be the next German target.[193]

Arrival of Additional Swedish *SS* Officers

During the spring of 1944 several Swedish *SS* officers would join the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. On the 11 March 1944 both – *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* and *3. Lehrgang für Germanische Offiziere,* officer candidate courses ended at Bad Tölz. A total of six Swedes had been studying there: **Rune Ahlgren** was a former Swedish army officer and Hanko Front volunteer. **Gösta Borg** was a Swedish officer candidate denied a commission for previous service with the *Waffen-SS* in 1941. Both received their promotion to *SS-Untersturmführer*, the lowest of the commissioned *SS* officer rank, directly. The remaining four volunteers graduated as officer candidates. **Heino Meyer** had served *3. Lehrgang für Germanisches Offiziere* with **Ahlgren** and **Borg**. He had also served with *'Wiking' Division* during 1941-43. **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez**, having previously served with *16./Rgt. 'Norge'* during basic training at Grafenwöhr, graduated as top of his class, the *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang*. **Torkel Tillman,** a former Swedish NCO, joined the *SS* in 1942 and served as an instructor at Sennheim camp. **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** would be transferred to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* at the end of the summer in 1944. These four volunteers, all former NCOs, were classified as 'Swede-Germans' with dual citizenship.

The training of these officer candidates did not end with the graduation at Bad Tölz. In most cases, the soon-to-be officers were sent to different training schools that were oriented to different branches of the *Waffen-SS*. **Ahlgren, Borg** and **Eldh-Albiez** were sent to *Panzergrenadier* school *'Prosetschnitz'*. **Borg** and **Tillman** were dispatched to the *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*. Both became war correspondents and would serve as such on the Narwa front. **Baecklund** was sent to a designated 'tank training and replacement regiment' to become a panzer officer. ***SS-Standartenjunker***

190 A document from the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps* lists him serving within *11./Rgt 'Norge'* on 12 January 1944. (Author's archive)

191 KTB 'Narwa' (BA-MA RH 24-54 / 133 / 51): 6.4.44.

192 KTB 'Narwa' (BA-MA RH 24-54 / 133 / 65): 7.4.44.

193 Poller, p. 94.

SS-Untersturmführer Heino Meyer wearing the black armoured crew uniform while serving as a platoon leader in the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* (Martin Månsson)

Heino Meyer, on the other hand, was sent directly to *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* without further training. He ended up a platoon leader in the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and soon became a notable favourite of the company.[194]

Sometime during spring 1944, **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** fell ill and underwent hospital treatment. On 10 April he got the chance to send a greeting to his parents, wife and son during an interview with the Norwegian *Kriegsberichter*. By the time the programme aired on 15 June, he had only about a month remaining to live.[195] Because of being hospitalized, he did not participate in the third and last of the *Strachwitz* operations launched against the Krivasso Bridgehead on 19 April. Battlefield conditions changed during this period, as the thaw set-in and transformed the roads into mud. The unfortunate terrain situation was compounded by the fact that most of the fighting would take place in nearby swamps. The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was committed and would suffer terrible losses. On 19 April, company commander **Walther Kaiser** was killed in action and **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** took over as the company commander.[196] Swedish ***SS-Standartenoberjunker*** **Heino Meyer** was severely wounded three days later. Resultant confusion at the field dressing station caused him to be reported as having died of wounds before the matter was cleared up. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Pehrsson** was most probably wounded shortly afterwards by shrapnel, but remained with his unit.[197]

194 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 60.

195 'Gespräch mit Norwegischen Frewilligen bei einem *SS*-Lazarett' – original wireless recording from 10.4.44. (Author's archive)

196 Report concerning the chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

197 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 62.

Several army Tiger tanks participated in combat during the operation. Additional support came from the rocket-artillery unit *SS-Vielfachwerfer-Batterie 521*. The advance, regardless of this heavy reinforcement, was brought to a halt by difficult weather and terrain conditions; the Krivasso Bridgehead would therefore remain intact.[198]

Rest, Recovery and Additional Swedish Reinforcements for *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt. 11*

On 30 April, the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* left the front for the resting area at Mummassaare. During May the spring thaw ensured the battlefront would remain quiescent, as the Soviet forces geared up for the coming summer offensive. This period would be utilized to rebuild the unit, train the new recruits and rest; vehicles received fresh coats of spring camouflage and were repaired.

A new batch of volunteers reached the unit that spring. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Rune Ahlgren** arrived after completing his training at a *Panzergrenadier* school. He was, however, placed in 2nd instead of 3rd Company, where he would serve as 1st Platoon leader. On 20 May, ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** was appointed platoon leader of 3rd Company.[199] Previous liaison officer service had made him unpopular amongst his fellow countrymen. This unfavourable reputation was further demonstrated when a draft of volunteers previously stationed in Finland was transferred to the battalion in Estonia. The group consisted of the following:[200]

Marcus Ledin (b. 1921) Enlisted in late 1941. *SS-Unterscharführer*; served with *'Westland'-Regiment* of *'Wiking' Division* where he was wounded.

Elis Höglund. (b. 1915) Enlisted prior to *Operation Barbarossa*. *SS-Rottenführer;* Awarded the Iron Cross Second Class whilst serving with *'Westland'-Regiment;* wounded several times.

Sten Eriksson. (b. 1920) *SS Sturmmann*. Enlisted 1942; wounded whilst serving with *'Germania'-Regiment* of *'Wiking' Division*.

Ragnar Johansson I. *SS Rottenführer* (b. 1908) Enlisted 1941**;** member of the *'Hamilton Group';* served with *'Westland'* and *'Germania'* regiments.

Sven Nordqvist (b.1913) Enlisted 1943. He was, according to **Karl-Martin Ågrahn**, the sole Swedish volunteer who overtly acted in a disloyal way towards Sweden.

John Wahlström (b. 1923) *SSS* member; enlisted August 1943.

Group morale was quite low. Both **Höglund** and **Ledin** were fed-up with the war. The former, on joining the *SS* in 1941, was a convinced National Socialist. These beliefs had almost dissipated upon reaching *'Nordland' Division*. An interest in self-preservation, as explained to the author **Lennart Westberg** in 1987, heightened a personal interest in the armoured vehicles fielded by the company:

> They had only a thin sheet of metal, which possibly protected against infantry fire but was basically coffins for us so-called *Panzergrenadiers*. I realized, with my knowledge of the Soviet forces' firepower, that I had to get back to good old Sweden as soon as possible before committing voluntary suicide.

198 Tieke, pp. 71-72.

199 Lebenslauf, Gunnar Eklöf. (NARA)

200 Sten Eriksson claims this took place in April while Ledin claims March. Both statements are questionable. Eriksson claimed that he requested transfer to *2./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 'Nordland'* shortly after arrival. Eklöf wrote in his Lebenslauf, short personal history in the *SS*, that he reached the battalion on 20/5 1944.

A group of Swedes posted in Finland before transfer to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* spring 1944. Left to right: Sven Nordqvist, John Wahlström, Marcus Ledin, Sten Eriksson and Ragnar Johansson. (Author's archive)

In Finland: standing on truck – Sten Eriksson, unknown; below – Sven Nordqvist, Marcus Ledin and Elis Höglund. (Author's archive)

Sten Eriksson did not mind serving in the *Waffen-SS*, but had no interest in service with *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. As explained to company commander **Pehrsson**, he already knew the spirit of Swedish soldiers; first-hand experience of the German fighting spirit was what he now desired. This unusual request granted, he was instead assigned to *4./SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11*. The actual reason was he did not wish to serve in **Gunnar Eklöf's** platoon, as there had been a personal conflict earlier.[201]

The men of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, in addition to the newly-arrived Swedes, were also visited by war correspondents of *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* who covered the fighting at Narwa. Four Swedish *Kriegsberichters,* all commissioned officers or officer candidates, visited the company during one recorded incident. Not only did they document and socialize with their fellow countrymen, they also made several attempts to recruit Swedes into their unit. Those approached included **Erik Wallin** and **Sten Eriksson**. **Eriksson** subsequently agreed while **Wallin** refused. The reputation of these war correspondents had been stained by the fact that one of them, **Hans-Caspar Krueger**, was bisexual. When this became known, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** handed him a loaded pistol and unsuccessfully urged him to shoot himself. These accusations would subsequently be investigated by the *SS*.[202] A cheerful event occurred during the end of May when the corps commander, **Felix Steiner,** celebrated his 48th birthday. It was decided to host a ceremony in his honour. One soldier of each nationality would participate. Amongst those chosen was **Erik Wallin.** Commander and subordinate would meet again a year later during the final battle for German and, if **Wallin's** testimony can be believed, **Steiner** actually recalled his name.[203]

Swedish volunteers of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* checking for lice. The second man from the left is Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. (Author's archive)

201 Letter from Sten Eriksson, 7.3.86. (Author's archive)

202 Poller, p. 92. See Chapter 7 for further information about Swedish *SS-Kriegsberichters*.

203 Wallin, Hillblad. p.66.

One of the most well-known photos of the Swedish *SS* volunteers, taken at Hans-Gösta Pehrsson's command post in Estonia during early summer of 1944. From left to right: Gösta Borg, Hans-Caspar Krueger, Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, Gunnar Eklöf, Carl Svensson and Torkel Tillman. (Author's archive)

3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 summer of 1944. (Author's archive)

Relative inactivity at the front allowed several battalion members to be granted leave. Amongst the volunteers were **Sven Alm, Knut Fagerström** and **Karl-Erik Pehrsson**, all of whom visited Berlin.[204] During their stay, they contacted the Swedish military attaché and handed over information concerning German anti-tank weapons, such as the *Panzerfaust* and *Panzerschreck*, complete with technical data and personal snapshots. Concerning the firepower of their unit, they gave the following joint statement:

> A village was to be retaken from the Russians. The whole Abteilung was involved in the attack. In less than five minutes, the whole village was completely in flames.[205]

They returned to their unit in the beginning of June. Exactly who was in command of the company by then remains somewhat uncertain. **Pehrsson** had led the company since **Walther Kaiser** was killed in April, but left the company to attend a training course for company commanders in June. It is possible his Swedish colleague ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** took over as temporary commander. This is not, in the absence of available documentation, entirely certain. Nevertheless, officer shortages in combination with what **Eklöf** told the police about his service in June 1944 and other known details suggest that it may have been the case. The three volunteers, **Alm**, **Fagerström** and **Karl-Erik Pehrsson,** had not only disclosed classified information about German weapons, but also requested help from the Swedish Consulate to be discharged. **Eklöf** received a severe reprimand from divisional commander **Fritz von Scholz** after the latter received their applications. The former related the following during a subsequent interrogation:

> Eklöf served as commander of the Swedes serving in his armored corps during spring 1943-44. As such, he had to approve leave or leave of service for Swedish volunteers. He also had to deal with other issues relating to their duties and, if necessary, punishment. At one point, he received a severe reprimand from his division commander on the grounds that it appeared as if Swedish volunteers, during their leave, sought contact with the Swedish Consulate in Berlin to thereby and through the intervention of said Swedish Consulate, to obtain discharge from military service. The divisional commander notified Eklöf that such procedures were considered escape attempts. Resignation would, as usual, go through the German military authorities.
>
> The mildest penalty for such an attempt would be transfer to the *'Sonderabteilung'* (Penal battalion) and as Eklöf felt that volunteers had sufficient chance to "die a hero's death" where they were assigned already, Eklöf collected the Swedes and told them what had happened. He had them sign a statement that they, in the event of future discharge schemes, would go through official channels. No threats were thus presented, but he told them of the risks engendered by direct appeal to the Swedish Consulate and that they would face punishment under German military law for any perceived escape attempts. The above-mentioned declaration, as far as Eklöf can recall, was signed by all Swedes in the division. Eklöf also took pains to point out that the German NCO of the division on several occasions had complained to the commander that the volunteers were better treated and received less severe punishments than other volunteers within the division.[206]

204 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)
205 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, p.324.
206 P.M. 13.10.45. Stockholm. P3592. (RA)

Panzerschreck rocket launcher picture smuggled to the Swedish military attaché in Berlin by three volunteers. (Lennart Westberg)

Volunteers of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* during the summer of 1944. Upper row from left: Ragnar Johansson (II), Ragnar Johansson (I), Gunnar Eklöf. Lower row: John Wahlström and Elis Höglund. (Author's archive)

The disaffected Swedes avoided being assigned to a penal battalion. Illness, nevertheless, took its toll: **Fagerström** suffered from a febrile illness in the leg, which resulted in him being reassigned to the company supply section.[207] Another volunteer, **Sigurd Mohlin,** suffered from tuberculosis and therefore left the company during June for medical treatment. He never recovered, and died in September of that year in a German hospital.[208] Exactly when **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** returned to the company remains uncertain, but he was certainly back by 28 June to attend a birthday celebration. Having been promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer* the previous week, he did not act as a company commander. That role had been taken by **Hermann Ahrens** following arrival from *'Wiking' Division*. Swedes serving as officer candidates were promoted the same day as **Pehrsson**. Their number included **Heino Meyer**, who became *SS-Untersturmführer* whilst recovering from the injuries suffered the previous April.[209]

Overview

The unit, based on the number of Swedes in the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, was at its peak by the close of June 1944. However, the number of volunteers who opted to be discharged was high: five deserted while in Croatia, two – **Walther Nilsson**, and Estonian-Swede **Arthur Thomson –** were killed in action, one – **Rune Wikström –** missing and presumed dead. Moreover, **Sigurd Mohlin** and ***SS-Untersturmführer* Heino Meyer** were convalescing in hospital; only the latter would return as the unfortunate **Mohlin** died of illness. Two – **Johan Westrin** and **John-Erik Eriksson** – were transferred to a training camp in Latvia, whilst **Sten Eriksson** was assigned to *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*. Lastly, it is possible that **Charles Lindberg**, by his own admission, was discharged.

Three officers, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** (3rd Company), **Gunnar Eklöf** (3rd Company) and **Rune Ahlgren** (2nd Company) remained. The number of NCOS and enlisted men numbered fourteen in all: **Marcus Ledin, Elis Höglund, Erik Wallin, Knut Wilgoth Fagerström, Nils Berg, Karl-Olof Holm, Karl-Erik Pehrsson, Frans Wahlberg, Sven Nordqvist, Ragnar Johansson I, Ragnar Johansson II, John Wahlström** and **Sven Alm** all served in 3rd Company. Volunteer **Ingmar Somberg** served with the battalion staff and an undetermined number of Estonian-Swedes were still with 3rd Company.

THE CALM ENDS – 'OPERATION BAGRATION': SOVIET SUMMER OFFENSIVE JUNE 1944

All hell broke loose following the promotions. The Soviet high command launched the great Belorussian offensive known as Operation Bagration against *Heeresgruppe 'Mitte'*; the entire central portion of the Eastern Front was torn open in just four weeks. The enemy achieved a tremendous strategic success, the entire *3. Panzer Armee* encircled at Vitbetsk and neighbouring *9. Armee* and *4. Armee* pushed westwards towards Minsk. By 29 June, 19 out of 33 German divisions from *Heeresgruppe 'Mitte'* had ceased to exist. Relentlessly advancing Soviet forces managed to break contact between *Heeresgruppe 'Mitte'* and *Heeresgruppe 'Nord',* to which the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was attached on 10 July. This allowed 29 Soviet rifle divisions and

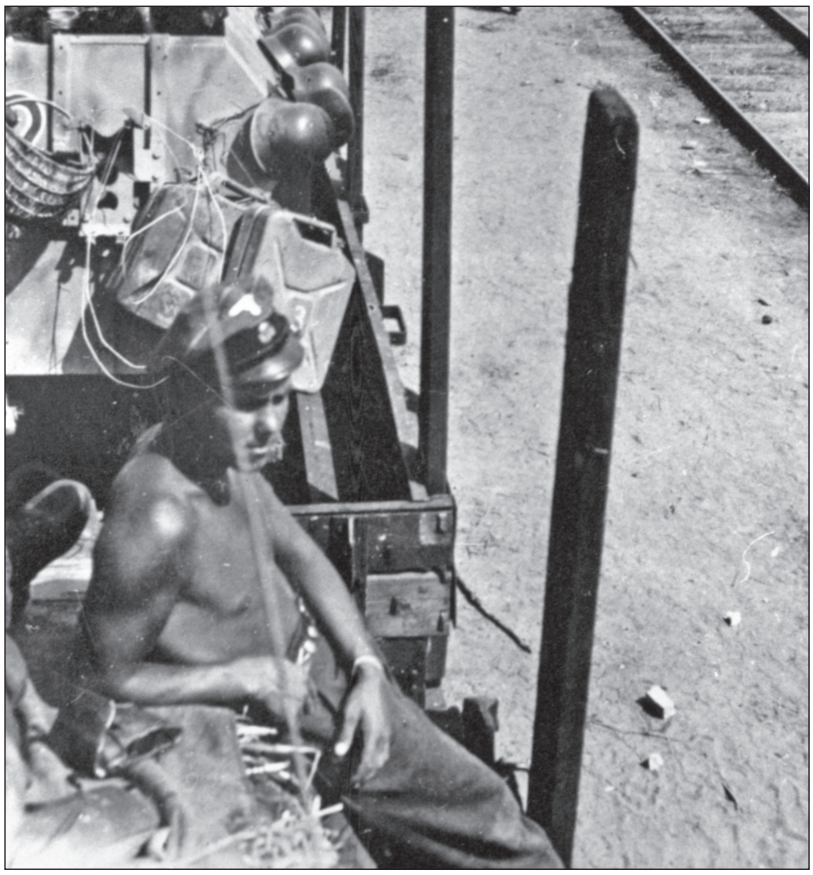
207 Document from Gunnar Eklöf to *SS-Hauptamt* about volunteer contact with the Swedish consulate. 24.11.44. (Author's archive)

208 The information about Mohlin was passed on to Swedish authorities by Wallin and confirmed by Gunnar Eklöf. P3592. (RA)

209 *SS*-Stammkarte for Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, Heino Meyer, Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez, Per-Sigurd Baecklund and Torkel Tillmann. (NARA)

a tank brigade to move along the Düna River towards Lithuania and Latvia, thus seriously threatening the *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'*.[210] This was followed by a general advance of the Soviet 2nd Baltic Front against the *18. Armee* situated south of Pleskau. The events of 10 July made it necessary to re-establish contact between the two army groups. Thus it was decided to form *Kampfgruppe 'Kleffel'* in Latvia on 12 July.[211]

It was decided, as the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was one of the few units which could be released from the hard pressed Narwa front, to move the battalion southwards to Latvia by train. Departing on the night of 11/12 July, battalion strength was recorded at 15 officers, 57 NCOs, 457 enlisted men and 110 half-tracks. The organizational scheme was that the battalion would be subsumed as *'Panzergruppe Saalbach'* (part of *Kampfgruppe 'Kleffel'*) at the town of Dünaburg, which was reached on 13 July.[212] The battle groups consisted, in addition to *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, of the *61.* and *225. Infanterie-Divisionen*.[213] Shortly afterwards, units of the *Kampfgruppe* managed to establish temporary contact with the *Heeresgruppe 'Mitte'* before it was broken again.[214]



Marcus Ledin on the train to Latvia. (Bosse B. archive)

210 Tieke, p. 83.

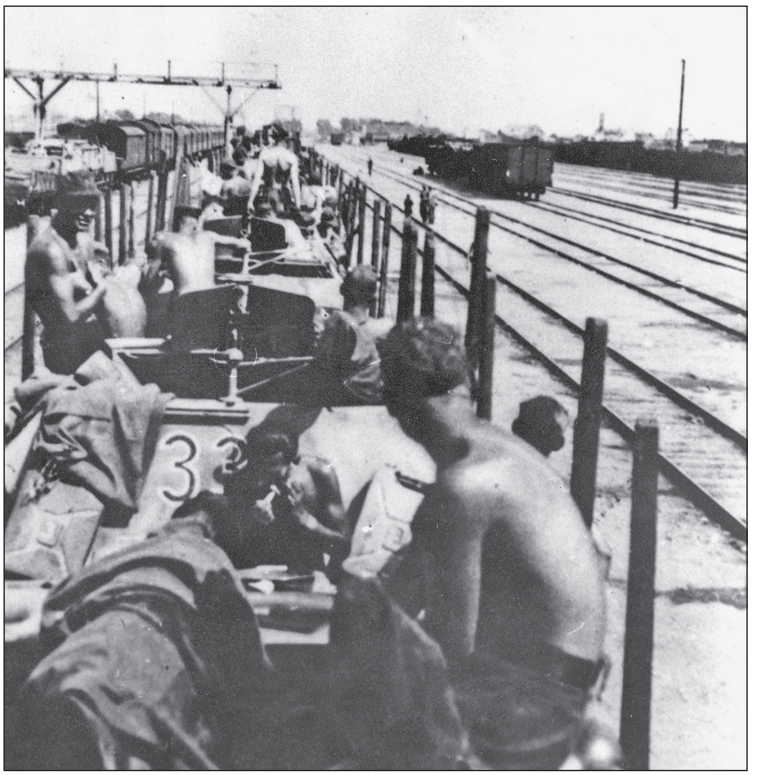
211 T-314 / 571 /0186. (NARA)

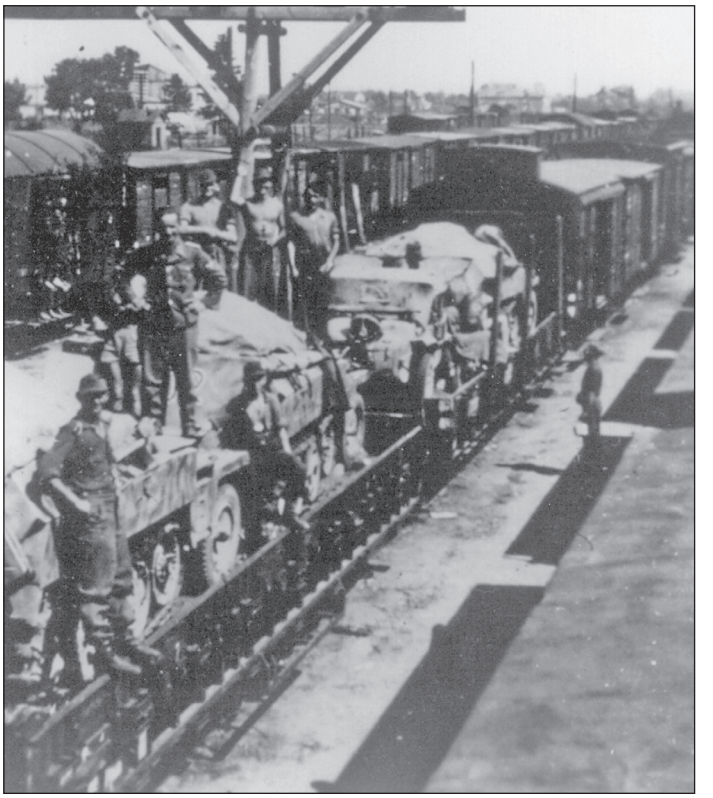
212 Document from *Armeeabteilung 'Narwa'* to *III SS Pz Korps* 11.7.44, 12.00, Document from *Armeeabteilung 'Narwa'* to *III SS Pz Korps* 11.7.44, 16.45, and document from 12.7.44. (PK archive)

213 T-314 / 571 /0186. (NARA)

214 Tieke, p. 145.

Swedish volunteers while on their way to Latvia. Hans-Gösta Pehrsson is shaving. (Martin Månsson)





Volunteers on their way to Latvia. Hands to the side in the middle is Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. (Martin Månsson)

Three Volunteers Desert

Three Swedish volunteers deserted while *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* entrained. **Nils Berg, Knut Fagerström** and **Elis Höglund,** taking advantage of the inherent confusion of loading men and equipment**,** jumped a train which took them in the direction of the Estonian capital of Tallinn. **Höglund** had, as with the other Swedish volunteers, just recently paid a visit to the Swedish military attaché in Berlin to receive help with a resignation application. Returning to the unit, he met the two others posted to the battalion maintenance/supply section; together they decided to desert. They managed to bluff their way through, claiming that they had lost their unit and constantly moved in the opposite direction when told how to find their battalion. They finally reached the Estonian-Swedish settlements on the northern coast of Estonia where the sympathetic population took them in and supplied them with civilian clothes. They remained there for several weeks while making a boat seaworthy. Crossing the Baltic Sea together with 15 civilians, they made their way to the Finnish island of Åland. There they were stopped by the Finnish coast guard, and, in order to hide their previous *SS* service, **Fagerström** threw his decorations, retained till then as a personal keepsake, into the sea.[215] With the help of the Swedish consulate at Åland, they were allowed to return to Sweden where they arrived one month after desertion on 11 August.[216]

It is possible that **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** approved of their actions to some extent. In post-war interrogations he claimed that during the Baltic State fighting he realized how the war was going to end. The same man who threatened to shoot those who requested resignation during the fighting in Croatia claimed that he approved of liberal leave, in order to avoid unnecessary losses among the Swedish and Estonian-Swedish volunteers, several of whom went to Haapsalu, where they had good contact with the civilian population. Implicitly **Pehrsson** wanted them to return to Sweden by boat. In his role as company commander, he was of course forced to submit reports on desertions from the company, but did so at such a late stage that they only reached higher authorities after German troops had withdrawn from the Baltic States.[217]

While this might seem odd given the previous treatment of volunteers who wished to return to Sweden, it was later confirmed by one Estonian-Swede who told the author **Lennart Westberg** the following during a 1995 interview:

> During the fighting in the Baltic States in 1944 Pehrsson gave several Estonian-Swedes leave to visit their homes and encouraged them indirectly to flee by boat to Sweden. I was one of the last Estonian-Swedes left in the company and to me Pehrsson said "Go and do not come back![218]

Whilst **Höglund** had lost his interest in National Socialism and later embraced syndicalism, both **Berg** and **Fagerström** maintained their previous political convictions to some extent. **Berg** still considered the Soviet Union a threat to all of the Scandinavian countries and **Fagerström** was described in a phone conversation between two *SSS*-members one week after his return as a "serious Jew hater".[219]

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215 Interrogation of Knut Wilgot Fagerström, 11.8.44. P4106. (RA)

216 Förpassnings document – 10.8.44, Swedish consulate Mariehamn. P4106. (RA)

217 Report, 26 Oktober 1945 re.. chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Nordborg. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

218 Gyllenhaal, Westberg, p.293.

219 Interrogation of Nils Frans Birger Berg, 11.8.44 (RA) and tapped telephone conversation between '*SSS*-Bosse' and 'Bergstrand' 17.8.44. (RA)

Nils Berg. (Author's archive)

Knut Wilgoth Fagerström. (Bosse B. archive)

Elis Höglund. (Author's archive)

Battles in Latvia (summer of 1944)

The town of Dünaburg was abandoned; no civilians or other German units remained in the area. On 14 July the battalion was tactically absorbed by the *225. Infanterie-Division* and was ordered to protect portions of the right flank of *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* and, in addition, to perform reconnaissance missions towards the *3. Panzer-Armee*.[220] This was the first time that the battalion was called upon to perform their designated role as a mobile and hard-hitting reconnaissance unit.

Patrols were sent out in order to discover the limit of the enemy advance. These were often platoon-sized and supported by heavy anti-tank half-tracks of 5th Company. The main objective of *Kampfgruppe 'Kleffel'* was to re-establish communications between the two army groups and try to stall the Soviet advance. One reconnaissance group, after driving throughout the night, encountered the enemy spearhead on 14 July. That same day the town of Uzpaliai was captured by the enemy. Volunteer **Ingmar Somberg** recollected the following about the fighting in Latvia:

> The entire unit was running with express speed by rail to the effected theatre on the River Düna. [...] I served as a reserve radio operator in the battalion orderlies' command trailer, from which I could follow the fighting from the 'front row'. Here, between Dünaburg and Mitau (Jelgava), was *AA11*, the fabled *'Panzer Gruppe Saalbach'*, which was everywhere and nowhere. Here we could use the 120 half-tracks for easy mobility. In addition, there were no specific orders given – just *'Rambefehle'*, allowing for improvisation and, above all, for the first time, we were able to retreat without being called cowards by the 'Wolf's Lair' in East Prussia.[221]

By the 15th, another town had fallen; it was clear that the enemy wanted to enlarge the breach between *16. Armee* and *3. Panzer-Armee,* to capture Dünaburg. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was ordered to move past the town of Rekiskis south of Kamajai, where it would attempt to halt the enemy northern advance between Svedasai and Uzpaliai. In order to complete their mission, they were reinforced by additional anti-tank guns.[222] However, on the following day it was reported that an additional two towns had fallen to the enemy.[223]

On 17 July, a *Kampfgruppe* consisting of parts of the battalion under command by ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Siegfried Lorenz,** occupied a defensive line north-west of Scolly Lake near Komal. On the same day, the inexperienced Swedish ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** was ordered to conduct a reconnaissance mission towards a village. His fellow countryman ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** volunteered to act as driver for the leading half-track. In a post-interview, **Eklöf** related the following account about the events of 14 July:

> We were inferior in manpower and materials during the retreat and it was extremely difficult to have any idea of where the enemy was. We had orders to scout a village to see how far the Russians had advanced. Pehrsson drove the leading vehicle in the column. I was sitting on top of it with my binoculars trying to discover anything of relevance. We approached the village entrance, which was shaded by trees. A more skilful squad leader would have stopped in order to let a few soldiers continue on foot, but I advanced. At about 50 meters distance

220 T-314 / 571 /0188. (NARA)

221 'Svenska krigsfrivilliga i *Waffen-SS*', *Meddelanden från Armémuseum* XXXXV-XXXXVI', Lennart Westberg, 1986, p. 276.

222 T-314 / 571 /0190. (NARA)

223 T-314 / 571 /0203. (NARA)

> the Russians opened fire with a 76.2mm anti-tank gun. I fell behind the vehicle when several rounds exploded. In the confusion, I wanted to open the hatch and destroy the lost vehicle, but soon realized it was pointless as it was already ablaze. I escaped through a cornfield to the next vehicle 70 meters behind. It was clear to me that Karl-Erik Pehrsson and the other had been killed.[224]

Other members of the patrol, alerted by the heavy Soviet fire, quickly dismounted to surround the village and eliminated the enemy garrison. The body of **Karl-Erik Pehrsson,** together with the other three crew members, was left inside the burning vehicle: "there was nothing to bury, they were cremated", **Eklöf** recollected. He himself was badly wounded, having received shrapnel wounds to the left elbow, left forearm and right thigh.[225] Evacuated back to Berlin for treatment, he never returned to the front. According to Swedish platoon commander ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Per-Sigurd Baecklund,** who joined the unit later that fall, it was rumoured that **Eklöf** was promised escape from further frontline service on acceptance of an assignment with the 'Nordic *SD* organization'. In short, it was claimed he was a coward amongst the Swedes. Nevertheless, he was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for meritorious service. It was, as far as this author is aware, his only combat award for three and a half years' service with the *SS*.

On the same day as **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** was killed, heavy enemy assaults by approximately two regiments, supported by heavy infantry weapons, forced the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and '*Sperrverband Reiwald'* to withdraw. The attacks continued with an additional two battalions assaulting the area east of Svedasai towards Juodonys. In order to help the hard-pressed *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* it was decided to send a *Wehrmacht* infantry battalion to support them.[226] Around 21.00 hours, it was also reported that enemy forces equipped with heavy weapons but lacking artillery support were advancing along the entire battalion front. By days' end, the enemy stood opposite a line extending southeast from Kunigyskisi to Juodonys.[227]

The 3rd and 4th companies acted as infantry in order to spare the vehicles, but the casualties continued to mount. Another Swede was killed just one day after the death of **Karl-Erik Pehrsson**. Twenty-one-year old **John Wahlström** served with the company since spring/early summer 1944. His loss deeply affected volunteer **Erik Wallin**, who during the post-war period related how **Wahlström** regretted his decision to join the *SS* and often had kept his comrades awake at night by crying.[228] The enemy continued their advance northwards; heavy battles raged from the early morning hours on the 18th. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* took up defensive positions at Height 110. The expected assault came at 18.00 hours. Two enemy companies stormed the battalion's positions, but were beaten back with heavy losses.[229]

The defending German forces had, unlike their Soviet opponents, a hard time replacing casualties. Soviet assaults continued along the road Svedasai – Komai against the right flank of the Corps throughout 19 July. The enemy assaulted with a full regiment, approximately 20-25 tanks and additional air support. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* despite being subjected to attacks from both south and west, managed to repulse the assaults and perform important reconnaissance missions westwards.

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224 Newspaper *Nya Norrland*, probably 1989. (KB)
225 Document in Eklöf's *SS*-Personalfolder. (NARA)
226 T-314 / 571 /0215. (NARA)
227 T-314 / 571 /0216. (NARA)
228 Erik Wallin in interview with Bosse B. (date unknown)
229 T-314 / 571 /0224. (NARA)

Sitting on the half-track to the right is the inexperienced and unpopular platoon leader Gunnar Eklöf. (Bosse B. archive)

Karl-Erik Pehrsson. (Bosse B. archive)

Masses of Soviet tanks were a threat to the lightly armoured half-tracks of *SS-Pz-AA11*. Marcus Ledin poses on a knocked out example. (Bosse B. archive)

The Germans could offer air-support too. This would, however, prove fateful for company commander **Hermann Ahrens.** On 20 July, a column of vehicles became embroiled in a major traffic jam. The unfortunate **Ahrens**, valiantly attempting to direct the hopelessly entangled vehicles, was killed by strafing *Luftwaffe* aircraft in a tragic and demoralizing friendly fire incident. ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** once again resumed the command of *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. The enemy maintained attacks against the corps' right flank. Artillery shells, rockets and bombs rained down on the hapless defenders, while some 70-80 enemy tanks charged forward. The battalion's positions situated on a height west of the town Panemunck continued to fend off relentless attacks from south and west. These finally faltered against stiff resistance.[230]

The battalion was absorbed by *61. Infanterie-Division* the following day. The reconnaissance missions continued as before. One patrol reported that enemy infantry were marching towards the north. Another report originating from battalion HQ stated that the height south of Panemunck had been occupied by hostile forces who were continuing the advance northwards in order to conquer the town.[231]

Situation of *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* on the Narwa Front Late July 1944

Back at Narwa it was clear that a large Soviet assault would hit the city's outlying defences. These were pulled-back to the Tannenberg Line on 23 July in order to shorten the front. This line stretched across three important hills approximately 20 km to the west. The expected assault by

230 T-314 / 571 /0257. (NARA)
231 T-314 / 571 /0265 – 0267. (NARA)

the 3rd Baltic Front opened the following day. The Soviets managed to achieve a foothold on the western bank of the Narwa River despite several counter-attacks by the *20. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (Estnische 1).* A general retreat began on the night of the 24th/25th. On the night of the 26th, it was noted in the war diary of the *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* that the *Tannenberg Line* had been occupied by *'Nordland' Division* to the right and *'Nederland'-Brigade* on the left. The subsequent retreat went well, although one whole regiment (*SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt 48 'General Seyffard')* was annihilated in the woods just west of the new defences. Another heavy blow hit *'Nordland' Division* on 27 July, when ***SS-Brigadeführer* Fritz von Scholz –** former regimental commander of *'Nordland'-Regiment* and divisional commander since establishment of the division, was killed. He was replaced by ***SS-Brigadeführer* Joachim Ziegler**. The situation was bleak in the southern part of the *Heeresgruppe* also. Enemy assaults continued at Polozk and on the 24 July Dünaburg was abandoned.

The retreat to the *Tannenberg Line* was covered by **Sten Eriksson**, the former member of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* who now served as a *Kriegsberichter*. In an article subsequently published in Estonia he observed:

> Faith is hitting Narwa
>
> The planned and peaceful retreat has started on the Narwa Front to shorten the frontline. For days and weeks, trains and trucks have evacuated material and useful equipment from the town. Everything of importance, including clothing, has been removed from reach of the enemy. Only *Waffen-SS* mobile units remain.
>
> On the night of 24th/25th, the Narwa bridgehead was evacuated and all positions there destroyed without interference by the enemy. Assault guns were driven to the west bank before the bridges were blown. These rained destruction on the attacking enemy on the opposite bank. Step-by-step our units were taking up positions in the west protected by one regiment of the *'Nederland' Brigade*.
>
> The town was in flames and smoke. Dog carriages transported the wounded through burning streets. Quietly, with tails wagging, these trustworthy animals were moving, now unafraid of whizzing shells. Everywhere, ensconced in corners with hot and dusty faces, were pioneers from mining commandos. Smoke and dust poured out from rooftops set afire by Soviet artillery fire.
>
> Sounds of fighting were rumbling from one bank to another and back again as far as Estonia. Narwa town had finally been reduced to earth; the Bolsheviks will find only ruins. Fire lights are shining in the summer night and, like Nordic lights in wintertime, herald new events for Estonia.[232]

Simultaneously, in Latvia, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* carried on the struggle. The battalion, after covering the large rail and road network, turned northeast into positions at Lake Satkuny on 26 July. Here they encountered 300 men from *Organisation Todt* awaiting seemingly inevitable capture by Soviet forces.[233] Indeed, the battalion, clearly surrounded by the following day, was left with one remaining option – a breakout to the north. Inconclusive fighting continued through the close of July. On 1 August, *3.* and *4./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* carried out a night attack against strongly held enemy positions at the village of Gujanay; the objective was to secure the village and drive

232 'Sakala', 7/8 1944. (Petter Kjellander archive)

233 Poller, p. 110.

northwards.[234] The Latvian fighting during the summer and fall of 1944 often resulted in entire companies being cut off and having to fight their way out. **Axel Ahlberg**, a Estonian-Swede in *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* related the following to author **Lennart Westberg:**

> During the fighting in Latvia in 1944 we were often cut off by the Russians. Of particular danger were Russian snipers in trees or on rooftops. Sometimes you could see them as a dark shadow against the trunk and shoot them down.[235]

Soviet forces, however, managed to cut off the *Heersgruppe 'Nord'* on the same day by reaching the Baltic at Tuccum.[236] *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'* was organised from several training units at the Seelager camp in Latvia in order to parry this threat. Three volunteers with previous service in *'Nordland' Division* were among their number (See the Chapter about Swedish volunteers in various combat formations for their experiences).

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 was ordered to march to Mitau on 4 August. Here they assisted *122. Infanterie-Division* with the formation of a bridgehead south of the threatened city. Once again, the battalion was called upon to perform its designated role as mobile reconnaissance unit by the dispatch of patrols towards Tuccum. Fortuitously, the battalion's time on the Latvian Front came to an end on 5 August when ordered to return to *Armee Abteilung 'Narwa'* by train.[237] There they would be in reserve at Kuramäe north of Lake Peipus.[238]

The battles in Latvia proved costly. During the period 19 July-2 August, *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* lost 5 *SS-Unterscharführers* wounded in action. Company commander **Hermann Ahrens** had been killed and platoon leader ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** had been severely wounded. Two more volunteers, **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** and **John Wahlström,** were killed.

Return to Estonia – *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* and the Battle of Tartu

The situation in the Baltic worsened on 10 August when a Soviet offensive was launched against defensive positions at the south-west corner of Lake Pskov, through Laura towards the Latvian railway centre at Gulbene. The main attack at Petseri achieved a breakthrough. Its goal was to advance northwards and converge in Tallinn with the advancing *Leningrad Front*, which was expected to break the German defence at Narwa and conquer what remained of Estonia. Reinforcements, including one group rushed to the city of Tartu, arrived too late to intercept Soviet units marching from three directions to cut off the beleaguered Narwa defenders. In view of this danger, it was decided to collect and insert units of *Armee Abteilung 'Narwa*' into the threatened area.[239] The battles that followed were incredibly disorganized, with assaults, counter-attacks and various reconnaissance missions.

In the early hours of 14 August, an order reached *III. Germn. SS-Panzer-Korps* to organize a *Kampfgruppe* under command of ***SS-Brigadeführer*** **Jürgen Wagner**, commander of the *'Nederland'-Brigade.* The new-formed unit, including *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.*, was designated *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*. The battalion was moved from Kuramäe to Tartu, southwest of Lake Peipus. Lacking information about the formation (*12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*) on its immediate

234 Poller, p. 112.
235 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, p. 293.
236 Tieke, p. 146.
237 T-314 / 571 /0215. (NARA)
238 T-314 / 571 /0468 and 0484. (NARA)
239 Kjellander, p.47.

A photo taken during the combat in Latvia during the summer of 1944. Sitting with a Stg44 assault rifle is Hans-Gösta Pehrsson; Marcus Ledin is standing. (Martin Månsson)

right, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was tasked with reconnoitring Anzen and the area around Werro as was the battle group assigned to establish blocking positions south and east of Tartu. Contact between *207. Sicherheits-Division* and *12. Luftwaffe-Feld-Division* was of the utmost importance, as the former unit belonged to *Armee-Abteilung 'Narwa'"* and the later to *18. Armee*. The situation was such that if the contact between these divisions was broken, contact between *Armee-Abteilung 'Narwa'* and *18. Armee* would have been shattered as well.[240] Reconnaissance patrols were sent out on 15 August in an attempt to discover the situation. Minor skirmishes erupted on the left flank of *207. Sich.Div*; *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* reported encountering four enemy tanks with accompanying infantry. These were expected to attack the area around Sangaste from the west. Another reconnaissance patrol reported that their own lines ran 1 kilometre south of Ridali on both sides of Height 103.3; no signs of enemy activity were observed. Another reconnaissance group was dispatched to the area around Vissi. At the same time, the enemy on the right flank of *207 Sich. Div.* managed to break through when a breach was created by the unexpected retirement of an neighbouring unit from Povl. The gap was eventually sealed by a tactical withdrawal to Hlvandi station. The Swedes in *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* (commanded by ***SS-Obersturmführer* Pehrsson)** were deployed to scout and secure the Sohar area whilst *Grenadier.Rgt 23* was deployed to form a blocking position that afternoon. It would, in the event the enemy used armoured forces to support his attacks, be reinforced by a platoon of heavy anti-tank guns from *SS* volunteer unit *'Wallonien'* and one platoon from *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* at the crossroads around the Uhti-Embach bridge. This position extended one km further east towards the Luunja Estate. The second battery from *Artillerie-Regiment 58* was in position 4 km west of Tartu in the area around Rowan.[241]

240 BA MA R S 2-3/6/002. (*KTB Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
241 BA MA R S 2-3/6/003. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)

The military situation changed drastically two days after the battle group was formed. During the early morning hours of 16 August, the Soviets attacked against Leevaku, Wobbe and the Rahumäe Estate, where the enemy also partially managed to reach the northern shore. On the Peipsi Peninsula major enemy activity was sighted. Around 4:10 a.m. a large concentration of enemy boats was detected east of Mehikoorma. All available artillery and heavy infantry weapons began to engage, while a hostile force of unknown size broke through to the south at Levaku. This latter push was parried by an immediate counter-attack.[242] The enemy breakthrough area was thought to extend as far as Aravu and the northern portion of Ulika Swamp.[243] Still another enemy thrust struck at Põlva from the northeast, east and south-east after dawn, but the attackers were delayed by effective defence. Despite this, the enemy managed to occupy the town Himmaste, and it was suspect that their spearhead stood west of Kitseroo. The battle group's right neighbour (*12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*) was also subjected to fierce assaults, but the line held. The overall situation was critical; the hard-pressed battle group was forced to gather in all forces, including reserves, in order to concentrate it forces and maintain contact with *18. Armee*. This proved to be the correct move as the Soviet forces, crossing lake Peipus, succeeded in landing and establishing a bridgehead at Mehikoorma and Joepara at 5.30 a.m.[244] This was, however, not reported until noon by *207. Sich Div*. Whereupon *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*, on receipt of situation reports, ordered *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and a supporting battery of *Sturmgeschütze* to attack from the West. The *207. Sich.Div* was deteriorating rapidly, so it was decided to deploy Estonian *Selbschutze* units as much-needed reinforcements.

Despite efforts by German air and naval forces, the newly-established enemy bridgehead slowly filled with troops. The enemy broke through from Jöepära westwards to the north-western edge of the Alika-swamp, from where they proceeded to the outskirts of Lispöllu. Most of the defence consisted of inexperienced Estonian border troops due to the dearth of German troops in the area. The enemy soon established a foothold and managed to penetrate as far as the regimental HQ of *Sicherungs-Rgt. 94*, which was forced to withdraw to Aruval. This development led to an immediate counter-attack being thwarted; the units were instead redistributed as follows:

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 supported by a *Sturmgeschütze* battery was to attack the enemy in Lispöllu, and throw him back across the forest road to the landing beach.
Gren.Rgt 23 was to attack from the west to east on the Rasin –Mehikoorma road.
The attacks would be supported by rocket launchers from the *III./ Schwere Werfer-Rgt 3* and conventional artillery from *Artillerie-Abteilung 258*, grouped northwest of Rasina.

The counter-attack, encountering fanatical resistance from the outset, could not be continued due to the withdrawal of *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*. This created a large gap on the right flank which threatened the neighbouring *207. Sich. Div* and the units that participated in the annihilation of the enemy bridgehead.[245] Thus the German riposte was cancelled to prevent formations/units from being cut-off. The enemy continued to bring up more troops and, that evening, deployed another battalion from the northwest. Consequently, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was ordered to protect Waste from the south-east and re-establish contact with the *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*. That same night, *207. Sich. Div.* was ordered to hold the Mae School – Popsikurmu – Mooste – Rasin bridgehead at all costs. This would allow the battle group's heavy weapons to be brought

242 BA MA R S 2-3/6/004. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
243 Ibid.
244 KTB 'Narwa' BA-MA 24-54 / 156 / 094.
245 BA MA R S 2-3/6/005. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)

back. *'Wallonien',* which had been held in reserve, were ordered to take up positions south and southwest of Tartu.

On 17 August, the withdrawal *207. Sich.Div* began well. However, the enemy attacked Rasin with a company around 11.30 a.m. only to be thrown back by a successful counter-attack. The gap between the Division and *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division* was still a major concern, especially as heavy Soviet motorized units managed to rush through the breach and threaten to cut off *Armee Abteilung 'Narwa'* from *18. Armee*. To avert this threat, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was inserted to close the breach and, from the Vaast Coast to the southeast, secure and cut off the enemy advance.[246] That evening, a battle group, previously cut off at Mehikoorma, managed to break out and reached the German lines after heavy fighting. It was now clear the enemy's ultimate objective was the old university town of Tartu. A number of units, commencing on the night of 17/18 August, were sent there; artillery batteries redeployed nearby and the city's male population mobilized to construct fortifications.[247]

That same night yet another battle group, '*Kampfgruppe* '*Dutter'*, was formed. It went into position astride Liiva – Hp. Laane, whereby it managed to close the gap between *207. Sich.Div* and *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*. They could not, however, halt the enemy's nightly advances which also threatened *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner's'* left flank and the right flank of *207. Sich.Div*. It was not until the morning of 18 August that infantry and *Sturmgeschütze* from *Kampfgruppe* '*Dutter'* managed to clear the road between Liiva and Hp. Laane of hostile forces.[248]

Throughout 18 August, *SS-Pz-Abt Aufkl 11* unsuccessfully attempted to close the gap between *207. Sich.Div* and *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division*. Enemy incursion, nonetheless, still managed to penetrate. This forced *Sich.Rgt 94* to withdraw its right flank two kilometres south of Lotwina-Musta. At the same time the enemy managed to establish a bridgehead in the area of *Grenzschütze-Rgt. 5* following a company-sized attack. The hard-pressed defenders, having conducted an immediate two-company counter-attack, were unable to throw the Soviets back. *SS-Pz- Aufkl-Abt 11* managed, however, to re-establish contact with *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division* still positioned in Reola, but the impossible situation in the latter's sector and in that of *207 Sich.Div* forced *Kampfgruppe* '*Wagner'* to regroup. *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was concentrated at Ignaste Height. It was reinforced by a heavy half-track armed with an anti-tank gun from *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. This would prove useful, as Soviet troops could be observed moving through the valley below. Alert *SS*-soldiers counted 15 enemy tanks. **Pehrsson** remained calm and awaited to give the order to open fire until the enemy approached the slope – the effect, fire from 30 machine-guns, one 20mm automatic cannon, anti-tank gun and mortars, was devastating. The surprised Soviets quickly fell back with heavy losses. Another attempt to storm the position occurred later that evening, but was also beaten back with heavy loss.[249] Both sides suffered during that bloody August; 3rd Company sustaining heavy losses. According to the testimony of one Estonian-Swede, this deeply affected the battle-hardened **Pehrsson**. Indeed, the former subsequently claimed that **Pehrsson**, blinded by rage, killed three former prisoners of war in Soviet service in cold blood.[250] This was also confirmed by **Erik Wallin**, to whom **Pehrsson** justified his action with the excuse that they could not be brought along.[251]

The Soviets were attempted to achieve a breakthrough opposite *207. Sich.Div* on the Ahja River simultaneously. Anti-tank gun and rocket launcher batteries were dispatched there to shore-up

246 KTB *'Narwa'* BA-MA 24-54 / 156 / 095.
247 BA MA R S 2-3/6/007. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
248 Ibid.
249 Information provided by Franz Bereznyak, serving in *3./AA11*. 1978.
250 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, note 83 p. 364
251 Information provided by Erik Wallin to Bo B. Undated.

Soldiers of the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, summer of 1944. Sitting in front is Karl-Olof Holm, the NCO behind is Marcus Ledin. (Author's archive)

A Swedish mortar crew: *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* often experimented with a variety of weapons. Here the soldiers seem to have mounted two gun-tubes from the standard 8cm German mortar together to make a "double mortar". (Author's archive)

the defences and stem the tide. The enemy attacked in the morning towards the village Lääniste (situated on the Ahja) but were halted. Around noon, however, several smaller units managed to cross the river only to be engaged by German armoured reconnaissance vehicles. The crossroads at Liiva and the Liiva-Hp. Laane Road remained, despite these worrying developments, in German hands after nightfall.[252] On the morning 19 August, the enemy massed in Lotwina. Their assigned task was to traverse Lotwina-Uniküla-Pakste Road and split *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* before moving on to conquer Tartu. Virge and Height 165.7 was captured on the right of *207 Sich.Div;* a further assault one kilometre south of Ahakoli was forced back by *4./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* Reconnaissance missions were also carried out by the battalion, reports that Vissi, 8 km south of Kambja and Prangli, 5 kilometers east of Vissi were absent of enemy forces. The Soviets occupied Russaku, two kilometres south of Prangli and during the morning it was also discovered that an enemy battalion was advancing westward along the edge of the forest south of Russaku.

The breakthrough area at Logina was blocked from the northwest by a reinforced company from *Gren.Rgt 23*; two reinforced companies from *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* went into blocking positions in the area about Patska and south of Uniküla.[253] One of the seven heroic acts that earned **George Langendorfs** (commander of *5./SS-Pz-AA11*) a German Cross in Gold occurred during this time while he served as acting *Kampfgruppe* commander. With two reinforced companies he averted several hostile assaults and managed to destroy a number of the enemy's heavy weapons.[254] The battalion also managed to drive back an enemy reconnaissance patrol on the southern shore of Ignastes after dark.[255] *207. Sich.Div* failed to establish connections with the right and force the enemy out of Uniküla. The Soviets reinforced their troops there in order to push on towards Tartu. The German defences opposite were strengthened by the insertion of *'Wallonien'* at Kuti. Despite the enemy's numerical superiority, they managed to storm Patska and take the mill 1.5 km east northeast of the town. Here they stood their ground against the repeated Soviet attacks. The staunch defence allowed *Kampfgruppe 'Dutter'* to pull back.[256] On the morning of 20 August, the Germans managed to withdraw to a new defensive position according to plan. An enemy breakthrough at Uniküla was halted by parts of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* attacking from the north and west. The battalion, reinforced by an army anti-aircraft group, strengthened the right flank. Ordered into position around Kambja, they carried out reconnaissance to the south and southwest in a vain attempt to re-establish contact with *18. Armee*.[257] The enemy, pressing on against the battle group's thinly-held front, were spotted advancing towards Uniküla on both sides of the Liiva-Reola Road; a less powerful Soviet assault was driven back at Sootoga. Indications that another attack was going to open south of Kambja, enemy units having been observed moving about Krüüdneri on Height 151.8 and Valgjävle, arrived about 1400 hours. Faced with these grim tidings, *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* ordered its last reserves to be deployed at Kambja. Any further attempts to outflank the battle group would be confronted by the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.*

Enemy assaults around Height 107.9 were stopped by *Sturmgeschütze* from *Kampfgruppe* '*Wagner'*, while *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* carried out additional reconnaissance missions resulting in the bombardment of enemy assembly positions by artillery and mortars. Soviet assaults south of Ignaste were halted, *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* managing to knock out several armoured vehicles.[258]

252 BA MA R S 2-3/6/007-008. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
253 KTB *'Narwa'* BA-MA 24-54 / 156 / 108.
254 DKiG Vorschlag, *SS-Obersturmführer* George Langendorf. (Author's archive)
255 KTB *'Narwa'* BA-MA 24-54 / 156 / 109.
256 BA MA R S 2-3/6/009-010. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
257 BA MA R S 2-3/6/010. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
258 BA MA R S 2-3/6/011. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)

The Red Army now attempted to exploit the gap between *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* and *18. Armee* by crossing the Embach River or the north-western tip of the Wirz-lake. Several units were moved into position on the battle group's right flank as a countermeasure. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* formed '*Blocking Unit Saalbach',* which in addition to the battalion, consisted of a light howitzer battery, a *Sturmgeschütze battery* and a company of *Heeres Pioneer Btl. 676* equipped with anti-tank weapons. Their mission was to conduct combat reconnaissance to the south and south-west and, if possible, halt the enemy. As the next day was expected to be eventful, it also received support from several 15cm *Nebelwerfer* rocket launchers suffering from an acute shortage of ammunition.[259]

Height 107.9 was re-captured after a successful attack with *Sturmgeschütze*, on the evening of 20 August, *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* managing to knock-out two enemy armoured vehicles and a heavy anti-tank gun south of Ignaste. Hammaste was also re-captured that evening by the *207 Sich.Div*. However, the enemy managed to breakthrough with one battalion northwest of Terikeste and, on the morning the following day, Hammaste was retaken by Soviet forces.

The Soviets carried out further battalion and regimental-sized attacks on both sides of the Tamsa-Elva Road against *'Sperrverband Saalbach'*. Around Luke the enemy gathered strong forces with armoured support while *4./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* conducted motorized reconnaissance assaults. The enemy succeeded in taking the crossroads south of Igevere and the forest area one kilometre southwest of Koivu, before a successful counter-attack supported by *Sturmgeschütze* reclaimed the lost ground. Enemy assembly points at Kambja, Patska and Hammaste were subjected to effective fire from artillery, rocket batteries and air bombardment throughout the day. At the same time, German units began running short of ammunition, especially for mortars, which, to some extent, could only be compensated by rocket artillery.[260]

'*Sperrverband Saalbach'* was relieved as planned on the night of 22/23 August and the withdrawal went as planned except for interdiction fire by the enemy. *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* just managed to hold the height after the situation stabilised following the initial attack of 18 August. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt. 11*, now reformed in the area around Luuk-Liivaku, performed reconnaissance to the west and south that succeeded in re-establishing the contact with *12. Luftwaffe Feld-Division* one kilometre east of Viisjärgu. It was during this period that yet another Swedish *SS*-Officer likely joined the Battalion: ***SS-Untersturmführer* Per-Sigurd Baecklund** (b. 1916) who had joined the *SS* at the beginning of 1943 for personal reasons. Denied a Swedish commission, he wanted to prove his worth by becoming a German officer. Claiming half-German lineage on enlistment, he also wanted to make certain that several flats belonging to his mother would not be confiscated by the Reich. He later claimed he signed the required service contract only after stipulating the addition of a clause stated he would be detained in case of hostilities between Germany and Sweden.[261] Swedish ***SS-Obersturmführer* Sven Rydén** had made several unsuccessful attempts to recruit him as a spy during the basic training at Sennheim. Following this, he was chosen to participate in the *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* at Bad Tölz. Dispatched to a tank training unit in Latvia after graduation, he was sent to the panzer school at Bergen where he received training on the *Pz.Kpw V 'Panther'* tank.[262] It was during this period another unsuccessful attempt was made to recruit him as a spy.[263] Following a short period of leave, during which he got married, in early August 1944, **Baecklund** ended up, according to other volunteers, in *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*.[264]

259 BA MA R S 2-3/6/012. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
260 Ibid.
261 Interrogation of Per-Sigurd Baecklund, 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)
262 Lebenslauf Per-Sigurd Baecklund. (NARA) and Aktennotiz 30381 Berlin 27/7 1944. (NARA)
263 Interrogation of Per-Sigurd Baecklund, 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)
264 Information provided by Erik Stig Wallin. 19.7.45. (RA)

SS-Untersturmführer Per-Sigurd Baecklund. (Author's archive)

The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* following its relief in on 22 August, carried out reconnaissance patrols that discovered that the enemy was just 2 km away. Moreover, it was also reported the enemy had broken through on the left flank. Accompanying battles sounds not being discernible, ***SS-Obersturmführer* Pehrsson** decided he would go on a solo reconnaissance mission to a village reportedly in the hands of the enemy. He was, shortly before his arrival, met by automatic fire, but managed to turn his *Schwimmwagen* about and returned unharmed. A subsequent motorized attack managed to retake the village with the loss of one half-track.[265]

At the same time, however, the enemy achieved breakthrough at several other places. A breach in the line at Unipia was repulsed after a successful counter-attack. Another assault, supported by armour, struck Reola Station and Height 72.5 only to be repulsed in close combat. The relentless enemy also succeeded in piercing the defences of *207 Sich.Div.* The position was only restored when the last available reserves were committed. Suspicions remained, nevertheless, that the Soviets would continue attacking in the direction of Luunja Bridge.[266]

In order to restore the connection between *Gren.Rgt 23* and *207 Sich.Div*. an attack was ordered on the Reola-Uniküla Road on 23 August, but it got bogged down as a result of an enemy counter-attack. Thus the enemy managed to breakout to the north near Unipia against Estonian *SS-Regiments 45* and *46* which were forced to retreat; *Gren.Rgt 23* was also exposed to enemy assaults and Soviet troops managed to occupy the forest south of Reola. *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* subsequently reported their line extended from Renna – Lemmatsi – Northern Laane (1 km south-west of Ülenurme) – west of Height 62.7 – house grouping 1 km north of Reola-Lange.[267]

265 Pehrsson's notes from early 1950s. (Author's archive)
266 BA MA R S 2-3/6/014. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
267 BA MA R S 2-3/6/014-015. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)

Erik Wallin and Marcus Ledin in front of a half-track. (Martin Månsson)

The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* acted as rear-guard and lost yet another half-track during the retreat on 22/23 August.[268] That same day the town of Noo fell to the Soviets and the enemy reached the southern point of the lake Wirz, breaking the communications between *Armee-Abteilung Narwa* and the *18. Armee* on the following day. For the *'Volksdeutsche'* soldiers, who comprised a large portion of *'Nordland' Division'*, 23 August was an unforgettable day. Most of them hailed from regions such as Sibenbürgen and Banat in Romania. It was on this date that Romania switched sides by joining the Allies, These soldiers, far from home and facing an uncertain fate, braced themselves to face further Soviet attacks.

On the morning of 24 August the Soviets marched northwards with regimental-sized units from Reola Station to attack the right flank of *207. Sich-Div*. At 10:00 a.m. the enemy charged again, this time against the area around Nurmee, with an infantry battalion supported by tanks. *Gren.Rgt 23* were unable to hold the line and the enemy managed to move through Nurmesniemi and Immatsalu (northwest of Andi) against Karev and took the tactically important Embach Bridge one km southwest of the Käreveäre Estate and then occupied the Karev Crossroads. That afternoon the enemy attacked again, this time westward. The ensuing battle left six Soviet tanks in flames. The Walloon volunteers and several supporting *Sturmgeschütze*, under the command of ***SS-Sturmbannführer* León Degrelle**, were ordered to recapture and destroy the Embach Bridge. Simultaneously, the enemy rushed more men and material towards the bridge from where the newly-arrived reinforcements threatened Tartu from the west. As the enemy moved closer to Tartu, the destruction of important installations commenced.[269] The fight for the city began on

268 Pehrsson's notes from early 1950s. (Author's archive)

269 BA MA R S 2-3/6/015-016. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)

25 August. *Gren.Rgt 23* was placed in command of all units on the city's outskirts. The south and south-western portions were defended by *Gren.Rgt 23,* whilst the western part was defended by Estonian units. *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were grouped inside the Tartu city limits; additional companies were situated to the west of the city. The enemy bombarded the outskirts of the city with mortars and rocket artillery in the early morning hours, while the Soviet air force was overhead, ready to strike at German defensive pockets. The Russian preparatory bombardment forced many of the Estonian troops to abandon their positions and flee to Embach Bridge. *Gren.Rgt 23* managed to hold out in the southern part of Tartu with reinforcements from *Heeres Flak Abt 292*. With nothing to prevent the enemy from moving in from the west, *Gren.Rgt 23* was forced to retreat over the Embach Bridge. Tartu was being evacuated.[270]

The eastward breakout east went as planned; *Gren.Rgt 23* went into position on the northern shore of the Embach, while German artillery effectively bombarded enemy positions in the city and northwest of it. The enemy continued sending troops north in a final effort to reach their goal of isolating German troops at Narwa. On 26 August, portions of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* withdrew from Tamsa and the day after the battalion participated in a counter-attack against Kuusma. This was followed by yet another counterattack against Karkma on the 30th. It was noted that Swedish-born ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Rune Ahlgren** had led an assault towards Käreväre Manor on the night 27/28 August. At 23:00 hours the assault was called off by **Ahlgren** as his force of four half-tracks faced encirclement. Despite this, he was later recognised for personal gallantry.[271] *II. Armee-Korps,* having arrived in the threatened area about the same time, succeeded in forcing enemy back over the Embach by 1 September. *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'* was subsequently relieved and withdrew towards Voldi, where the battle-group reformed before moving to Metaguse. The exhausted and manpower-reduced units were finally able to rest and absorb replacements. Meanwhile, the Soviet advance continued southwards pushing towards East Prussia and Riga. The vaunted *Tannenberglinie*, now that Tartu had fallen, was threatened with encirclement.[272]

The overall strategic situation was by now untenable. On 18 September, *Operation Aster* – the evacuation of Estonia – was officially sanctioned. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was chosen to cover the southward withdrawal towards Latvia. Four days later, *'Nordland' Division*, situated approximately 30 km north of Riga, received orders to march south to Tuccum, where *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* took responsibility for the front. On 26 September, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was released and rolled through Riga to take up positions in what would become the Courland Pocket. Only a few days earlier, the *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* published an article about *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Riddled with errors concerning dates and places, it provides interesting insight into what was being written at the time. This is especially true since the *SSS* party's official stance by then was to discourage Swedes from enlisting in the *Waffen-SS*:

> At last, full reports have reached us about our comrades faring in the Baltic states during the summer and autumn battles. Below is a complete account of the Swedish company's history, although now, because of heavy losses, it mainly consists of Germans and Romanians! However, it remained, until the evacuation of Estonia at the end of September, in full command of a Swede. The commander was *Oberscharführer* (Corporal) Pehrsson who greeted us in the *Den Svenske* last Christmas (He has since received promotion). The four platoon leaders were also to a large extent Swedes. The company has been a pure tank unit, which means that it has travelled far in its surroundings. From the start of the year to 11 June, it was stationed at Narwa and

270 BA MA R S 2-3/6/017. (KTB *Kampfgruppe 'Wagner'*)
271 Diary of *SS-Hstuf.* Kurgvel, Estonian liasion officer in *Armee Abteilung 'Narwa'*. (Petter Kjellander archive)
272 Poller, p. 135.

participated in the successful defensive battle for this city. From there, the journey continued to Roskiski in Lithuania, where it participated, at times, in heavy fighting till 11th July. Reassigned to the Courland front, several small pushes were made towards Dünaburg. Later, the company participated in the fight to restore communications with Riga. Following this, it returned by railway to Narwa on 6 August, remaining there until the 13th, when the forced road march slowed down to walking pace, where the Bolsheviks had broken through. During the annihilation of the Tartu Pocket, the company participated on both the western and eastern sides during late August and early September. Nine Russian divisions ended their murderous lives there.

On 10 September, the company was deployed at Isaki on Lake Peipus. It was here that they received the evacuation order of 17 September. How the majority of the company came out of Estonia is unknown. Rumours about front-soldier Erik Wallin's death are groundless. According to recent information, he has received awards and promotion.

The fact that Sweden is now directly threatened by the advancing Red Army on a front longer than Germany, removes every reason to further strengthen the dwindling *Waffen-SS* volunteers. We must, Like the Germans focus on homeland defence. This does not diminish the honour for the small numbers of volunteer who serve in Sweden's outposts on historic eastern battlefields during the run-up to the neighbouring countries' borders. We are proud of the small Swedish groups on both sides of the Gulf of Finland have been members of Sveaborg. From Hanko to Tali and Pernau, Sveaborg of the *SSS* has been the only Swedish organization to maintain our historical obligation and, with weapons in hand, fight for our country's freedom and future. May we always, even during difficult times, remember this and never forget the 44 comrades who, during this crucial stage of the struggle for freedom, gave their lives for Sweden."[273]

The *SSS* party's discouragement of further volunteerism is understandable when considers the response in a World War context. The conflict was not going well for Germany. Finland agreed to a cease-fire with the Soviet Union five days before the article was published. Thus, just as Romania had done less than a month earlier, they ended further military cooperation with the Third Reich. Germany had lost two allies in less than a month and the Soviet forces that previously fought on those fronts could now be sent elsewhere. At the same time, the Western Allies, making great progress on the continent, had liberated Paris.

WOUNDED, RELOCATED AND SWEDISH DESERTIONS – SEPTEMBER 1944

During September, several Swedish volunteers left the company by various means. **Ragnar Johansson I** was wounded.[274] He is said to have been spotted running two kilometres with a large piece of shell fragment sticking out of his back.[275] This did not, even if he was absent from *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* until April 1945, exclude him from participating in combat. He saw, by his own admission, action outside Aachen against the Americans later that year.[276]

Per-Sigurd Baecklund, the officer who joined the battalion in August 1944, was most probably sent off in September 1944. As a trained tank officer, he was somewhat misplaced in an armoured reconnaissance battalion. His subsequent service remains somewhat uncertain, but the following is a reconstruction based on documents in his *SS* personnel folder and statements by former

273 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 24.9.44. (KB)
274 Information provided by Erik Stig Wallin to Swedish police concerning volunteers, 19.7.45. (RA)
275 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 40.
276 Compilation case XII 83, Ä. 632 (Interrogation of Ragnar Johansson). 11.3.47. XII 83/Ä 632. (RA)

comrades. It appears that he was transferred to *SS-Pz.Rgt 2 'Das Reich',* which was equipped with the tank he was trained on. However, the regiment fought in France, while **Baecklund** remained on the Eastern Front, so this transfer most likely only occurred on the paper.[277] Another unit equipped with Panther tanks was *SS-Pz-Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza'*, the panzer battalion of *'Nordland' Division*. He was in all likelihood, transferred to this unit at the end of September 1944.[278] **Erik Wallin** claimed that **Baecklund** served in the same company as himself since the Courland Pocket until January 1945. It is, however, clear that he served with *'Hermann von Salza'* at some point, battalion commander **Paul-Albert Kausch** remembered him having served.

'*Hermann von Salza'* was at the time a broken unit with only a few serviceable tanks – its overall combat value was almost zero. From the very start it had been a poorly equipped unit. The original idea was for it to be a tank regiment, but, during the organizational phase, the second battalion was detached to form *Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 503*, an independent heavy tank battalion. All that remained was *the 'Hermann von Salza'* Battalion*,* which received training in Croatia with Italian light tanks seized after the Italian capitulation in September 1943.

The unit abandoned its training tanks after entraining for the Leningrad front in early 1944 and had them replaced by Pz.Kpw V "Panthers". These were far from brand new, having originally been delivered to the *1. SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler"* in mid-1943. These vehicles, it was soon discovered, suffered from major technical problems, so it was decided to send the most seriously affected to the Leningrad sector where they were put into action as fixed defence guns. Following herculean efforts by the unit mechanics of *"Hermann von Salza',* several of these was put into service. These vehicles, however, were not enough to fill the necessary complement, so the unit was further strengthened by the addition of several *Sturmgeschütz*, assault guns.

It was during the retreat from Estonia that another trio of Swedes serving together in a half-track decided to desert: ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Ingmar Somberg,** who had been recently transferred from battalion staff to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Marcus Ledin** and ***SS-Sturmmann*** **Sven Alm.**[279] The story of their flight from service was related by those involved in the *SSS* party's official news organ, *Den Svenske Folksocialisten,* under the title 'Tank Travel through Soviet-Estonia'*:*

> On July 11, the unit went into action at Courland and experienced very hard fighting there. It was during a reconnaissance thrust towards Dünaburg that *sveaborgsman* Karl Erik Persson was killed. Later the company returned by rail to Narwa and stayed there until 13 August when they were ordered to urgently head towards to the Walk sector, where the Bolsheviks had broken through. The company participated there in the annihilation of the nine Russian divisions who were trapped in the Tartu Pocket during the massive Russian offensive. The huge deployment of Russian infantry and tank destroyer weapons, in conjunction with the Finnish capitulation, made it impossible, despite the victory, for the Germans to retain Estonia.
>
> The company, which recently was inserted at Isaki close to lake Peipuss, received, on 17 September, orders to withdraw to Pernau for evacuation. On 19 September the company was involved in rearguard battles, during which two of its half-tracks were destroyed by sudden air attacks whilst the engine hoods were open. Russian aviators in general caused more damage than ground troops, many of which behaved in a typically incompetent manner, they moved upright and practically in a straight line. On the morning of 21 September, the company was still on the road to Pernau. Sveaborg-man Ledin drove a half-track in the company column

277 Document from *SS-Führungshauptamt* IIa, nr. 30379. (NARA)

278 Personalverfügung der *SS*-Untersturmführer Baecklund, Sigurd. 20 Sept 1944. (NARA)

279 P.M. Stockholm, 3.1.46. P6338. (RA)

with two Swedish friends as crew. As a result of engine damage, they were left behind by the others and at 1600 hours they reached the Pernaus suburbs only to discover it was already occupied by the Russians. They turned around and tried to reach Tallinn. In the darkness of night they ran straight into two trucks, both of which were overturned. In the belief that there were refugees, who in endless streams made their way down towards the harbours during these days, they stopped and Ledin went out to investigate. They found beneath the wrecks four crushed Russians in full gear. The remainder of the Red Army soldiers had fled to the surrounding forests. They were fired upon as they approached the suburbs of Tallinn. The town was also occupied by the Bolsheviks. They then made their way down to Haapsalu, the last port in which they could hope to find their own troops. During the journey, time and again they faced Russian barricades across roads and were fired upon, occasionally by anti-tank weapons. The Swedes were, however, lucky and escaped without their vehicle being hit. Only by traveling on small forest roads, did they reach Haapsalu only to find the Bolsheviks were there already. A small German and Estonian force defended the city, but it was impossible to make contact with them. It is likely they were totally surrounded.

At 4 o'clock on the morning on 23 September, the three Swedes continued their adventurous trip to a small community near Haapsalu named Noarootsi. On going into a farm to make customary enquiries, they discovered to their surprise that the residents were Swedish! They had reached the old Estonian-Swedish region where a few residents still remained. They were very favourably received, and, after they had hidden their good old halftrack in some bushes, they were provided with food and drinks and rested a full day. On 24 September, they made yet another vain attempt to reach the unit in Haapsalu, this time in a regular car and wearing civilian clothes all of which were borrowed from their hosts. The roads were full of Russians and they made their way through, thanks to some good luck and prevailing confusion amongst the Bolsheviks, and to their former hosts, who knew all the back roads on the way to Noarootsi. They also made an attempt to get away by boat at Noarootsis fishing port, but the beaches were black with people who were out on the same mission. Just prior to taking their chance, came a Russian truck column of troops out to catch the refugees that forced them into hiding.

On the morning of 25 September they set off on a new reconnaissance tour of the coast and, close to Noarootsi, they discovered a collection of large and small boats that had been abandoned by their former owners and thrown in the shallow waters. Among them was a motor schooner, which seemed more seaworthy than the others. With the help of some Estonians – many former Estonian soldiers who had lost their unit – they managed to reequip the boat with sails drawn from other wrecks. The Russians, situated at a crossroads less than a kilometre away, noticed nothing of their proceedings. Sveaborg-man Ledin now took the lead of a refugee crowd and ran it in a military fashion. Guards were placed on the beach to warn the boat workforce if the Russians were approaching. The halftrack was driven down and, as its last mission of its life, was to launch the boat into deeper water. It was now 200 meters out, but because the depth was extremely shallow it was still not completely afloat.

A large crowd of refugees gathered and awaited the arrival of an Estonian-Swedish family and an Estonian girl. The latter who travelled by horse and wagon to bring her belongings. Her desire to rescue some of her parents' belongings resulted in the horrific fate of falling into the hands of the Russians. The Swedish family did not arrive and had to be left behind.

A dramatic incident occurred at night when Ledin torched the half-track where it stood in the water with the last of the vehicle's fuel. The nearby Russians were thus warned that something was going on and moved some tanks on the beach and let their lights illuminate the seafront darkness. Rainy and foggy weather ensured they found nothing. However, sentries were left behind and an exciting night-time game of hide and seek ensued when M. went to

> the beach to collect their own sentries including one of his tank mates.
>
> Dawn arrived at four o'clock and it was high time they got away. It had been expected to tow the vessel using a small motorboat. This failed as the ship, now loaded with 134 Estonians, the Swedish trio and a lot of possessions, was too heavy. The situation looked hopeless when a storm blew in and the waves grew stronger. The Estonians retrieved a number of poles from nearby wrecks. By bringing together some twenty able-bodied men to push with all their strength, sveaborgsman M managed to release the boat at six o'clock.[280]

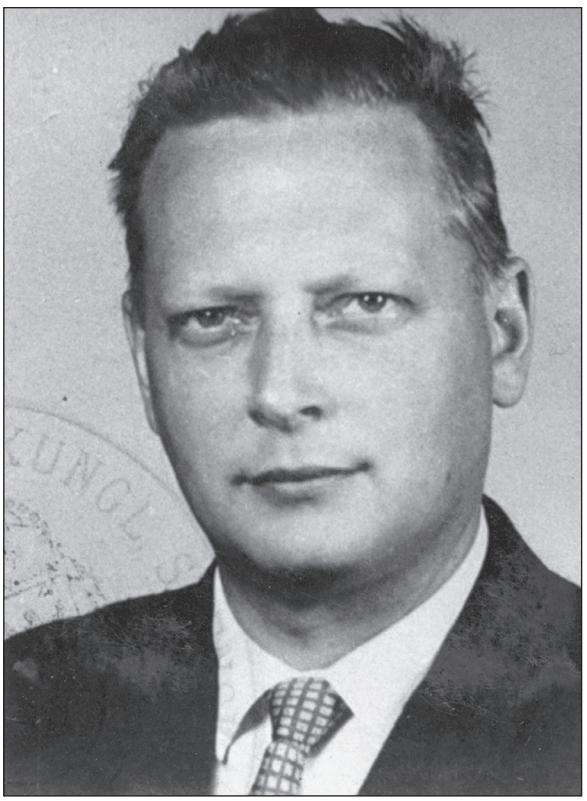
After an adventurous journey, the refugees met patrols of the Finnish Coastal Guard. The refugees feared, now that Finland had broken its alliance with Germany, that they would be extradited back, but the Finns decided to turn a blind eye and allow them to sail on to Sweden and safety.

The overloaded boat reached Norrtälje on 4 October 1944 with 134 Estonian refugees.[281] The Baltic crossing had not been without difficulties and dangers, harsh weather and storms affecting the refugees and, according to **Somberg**, six of the Estonian passengers had been washed overboard and drowned.[282] All were quarantined after arrival. Amongst the personnel of the quarantine camp was member of the Women's Service Corps, one of whom hurled insults about the former *SS* soldiers and stated that people like them should be extradited back to the Russians. **Ledin,** on overhearing this, replied: "What you know about the world is equal to nothing. When you have gotten to know Bolshevism, you will fall on your knees in gratitude on meeting a Nazi".

It was initially planned to have the Swedes and the accompanying Estonian refugees remain in quarantine for 14 days.[283] However, following consultation with doctors, it was decided to set the Swedish volunteers free. **Somberg** and **Ledin** returned to home in Stockholm on 10th October. **Alm** returned to his old Regiment the following day.[284] The police took interest in all of them: **Alm** subsequently admitting his desertion with **Rune Wikström**, who had been killed in action. He also admitted supplying information concerning the town garrison where he served to the spy **Thorvald Calais**. At first he had refused, telling the German agent that they enlisted in the *SS* to fight; not to betray their homeland.[285] **Calais**, in a private conversation, convinced **Alm** that Swedish democracy was the arch-enemy of National Socialism, after which the youthful deserter supplied intelligence about ordnance, sentry schedules and radio equipment. Court martialled and sentenced to three months in prison, it was noted that apparent immaturity – he was 17-years-old at the time – contributed to his treasonous actions. Nevertheless, he was allowed to return to military service without actually serving his sentence.[286] **Somberg** was sentenced for crossing the border illegally and fined.[287] **Ledin** had left the country with a valid passport in 1940-41. He was, however, suspected of stealing a bicycle back in 1940-41. Whether or not he was sentenced for this petty crime remains uncertain.[288]

280 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, 18 November 1944. (KB)
281 To Mr Public Prosecutor Sven Wannstedt, Stockholm 02.05.45. (RA)
282 P.M. Stockholm, 3.1.46. P6338. (RA)
283 P.M. Stockholm 10.10.44. P6338. (RA)
284 Ibid.
285 Report Saturday 7.4.45 concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. G-akt 140:161. (RA)
286 Report Saturday 7.4.45 concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. G-akt 140:161 (RA) and Extract from the protocol of the Regimental courts martial of Sven Anders Gustav Alm. 16.4.45. G-akt 140:161. (RA)
287 P.M. Stockholm, 3.1.46. P6338. (RA)
288 P.M. Stockholm 10.10.44. P6338. (RA)

Marcus Ledin and Estonian refugees. (Bosse B. archive)



Sven Alm. (Author's archive)

Why the trio deserted also remain uncertain. Both **Ledin** and **Alm** related the same story to the police as that described in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*,[289] **Somberg** also concurred with this account in a number of interviews conducted during the 1980-90s. He also claimed service with the *'Wiking' Division* in 1941, which was a complete falsehood. Conversely, following his return to Sweden in 1944, he told the police another story: The trio, he claimed, had actually agreed they would desert and intentionally abandoned their unit during the retreat in order to make their way to the coast.[290] This story is substantiated by **Erik Wallin** who, during a post-war interview, claimed he had been approached by **Ledin** who informed him of their plan and urged him to join them. He refused, but would maintain post-war contact with **Ledin** whom he considered a "good bloke" discouraged by a war injury received in 1942.[291]

Overview

The battalion had been in active combat in its designated role for two months when the order to evacuate Estonia arrived in mid-September 1944. The subsequent summer battles had been the first and last time it was used as a mobile and hard-hitting reconnaissance force and, during the period prior to departure for Latvia, there seems to have been about 17 volunteers serving with the Battalion. Two months later, **Karl-Erik Pehrsson** and **John Wahlström** were reported killed, while two – **Gunnar Eklöf** and **Ragnar Johansson I** – were wounded. More noteworthy, however, is the fact that a total of six volunteers deserted, all of which managed to make their way home.

COURLAND

Retreat towards Courland: Latvia – Fall 1944

On 27 September, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was once again on the move, this time racing towards Doblen, some 70 km distant. No large-scale combat took place, as the Soviet forces were making themselves ready for their large westward push. Even if *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* had escaped from total encirclement following *Operation Bagration*, the situation was about to change. On 5 October the enemy began another large-scale offensive, which five days later reached the borders of East Prussia. The situation on the southern flank was so dangerous that it was decided on 7 October to dispatch a corps' *Kampfgruppe* – including *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* – to shore up the defence. On 10 October, the same date as **Pehrsson** celebrated his 34th birthday and was given a poem chronicling the company's previous efforts, the whole of *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* was cut off.[292] On 12 October the entire corps was sent to occupy the new defensive sector south of Preekuln; Riga was abandoned despite **Hitler's** express orders the following day. Thousands of German soldiers, the Baltic at their back and a numerically superior enemy to the front, faced certain destruction.

This would have a devastating effect on the morale amongst the Swedish and Estonian-Swede population. "Our first thought every morning was that we wanted "home to Sweden" which we considered to be our fatherland" claimed Estonian-Swede **Axel Ahlberg**.[293] This also affected the

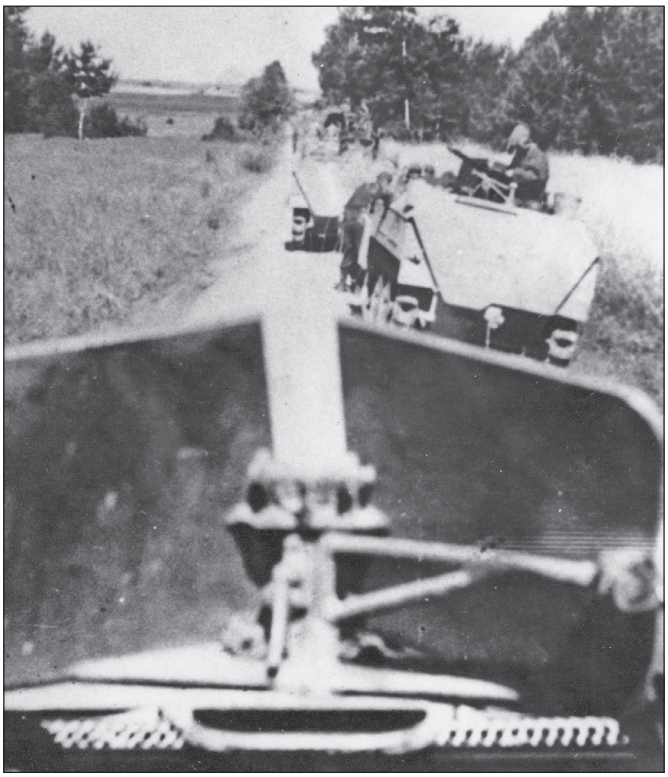
289 To Mr Public Prosecutor Sven Wannstedt, Stockholm 02.05.45. (RA) (RA) and Report Saturday 7.4.45 concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. G-akt 140:161. (RA)

290 P.M. Stockholm, 3.1.46. P6338. (RA)

291 Poller, p. 126.

292 Ibid, p. 146.

293 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, p. 293.



A picture taken inside a half-track of the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, summer of 1944. (Bosse B. archive)

Swedish volunteers and, in October 1944, the last to desert – ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Karl-Olof Holm** – abandoned *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* He had written to his mother the previous spring that he was waiting to return home following contract expiration. Unlike the other volunteers who deserted during summer and fall, he would fail to make his way back to Sweden. As **Erik Wallin** subsequently related during police interrogation in 1945:

> Holm was in Courland at the same time as Wallin. [He] deserted the company sometime during October 1944 with the intention of making his way from Liepaja to Sweden, but was captured by the field police. His ultimate fate is unknown; Holm was promoted to *Rottenführer*."[294]

As told by **Wallin**, the exact fate remains unknown to this day. Not long after the war, the Norwegian police forwarded several seized documents, some of which concerned the fate of **Holm,** to Swedish authorities. These noted that he was transferred to an *SS*-court for "further measures".[295] The unfortunate **Holm** was most likely executed or killed whilst serving with a *SS* Penal Battalion in the Courland Pocket. He served as squad leader at the time of his desertion.

294 Information provided by Erik Stig Wallin to Swedish police concerning volunteers, 19.7.45. (RA)
295 Fahndungsersuchen, Karl-Olof Holm. 25.1.45. Ers.Kdo. Norwegen. 50:6/4. (RA)

Karl-Olof Holm and Erik Wallin. Holm was the last of the Swedish deserters in *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Captured by the German field police, he was probably executed. (Martin Månsson)

The Courland Pocket

With the encirclement of the *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'*, the first battle of the Courland pocket began on the 13 October as Soviet assaults tore into defending German forces simultaneously from north and the south. The enemy objective was clear: to capture the harbour in Liepaja, which was essential supply route for troops in the pocket. On 15 October, *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* took responsibility for positions previously held by *14. Panzer Division*. The enemy struck *30. Infanterie-Division* and *Rgt. 'Norge'* not long after they occupied their positions the following day. *II./Rgt. "Norge"* lost contact with *III./Rgt. "Norge"*. The gap remained the target for the Soviet attacks throughout the next day. Another gap was also created between *II./Rgt 'Danmark'* and *III./Rgt.'Danmark'*. *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, in order to close it, took up positions astride the Gramsden – Purmatsi Road.[296] The battles continued, with *Rgt. 'Danmark'* committing all available reserves to the battle. The two battalions, after heavy fighting, managed to establish contact on the night of 23/24 October. Following this, the front calmed down – the first Courland battle was over.

3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 was seriously reduced in manpower not only seen to the Swedish volunteers. The company, nevertheless, achieved an important temporary victory. In December 1944, company commander ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** was awarded the *Ehrenblattspange des Deutsches Heeres* for command of his company during the fighting of 16-19

296 Tieke, p. 182.

October.[297] This made him, in addition to **Sven-Erik Olsson** who was awarded the German Cross in Gold whilst serving with *Frundsberg Division* in 1945, the highest decorated Swedish volunteer.

The exact reason for the award remains a mystery. **Pehrssons** orderly, **Franz Bereznyak**, related the following post-war account that, although plausible, is a bit off chronologically:

> The place was called Trekni. *Obersturmführer* Pehrsson received his orders directly from divisional commander *Brigadeführer* Ziegler: 'A strategically important height protects Liepaja. It must be taken and under all circumstances be held to the last man!' After the assault, when we had occupied the height and the Russian bunkers, only 25 men remained of Pehrsson's company. It was a horrible massacre; man against man. The Russians knew what was at stake and threw everything at us to recapture the height. During four days' fighting we repulsed every assault. We had to retreat on the fifth day. Pehrsson's command post was 100 metres behind the frontline. I will never forget the moment when he saw us running back. "Cowards!" he yelled and led us into a counterattack. We held out for another week. Few remained when relieved.[298]

Approximately 100 Soviet soldiers were captured when the position was retaken. Following this, a radio message to Battalion HQ stated the attackers would abandon the contested height if schnapps was not immediately sent up. Battalion commander ***SS-Sturmbannführer*** **Rudolf Saalbach** personally delivered the desired bottles. Seven burnt-out T-34 tanks remained in front of the position after relief.[299]

The problem is that **Bereznyak's** story chronologically takes places at the start of November 1944. Thus this battle would have raged during a period of calm between the first and the second battles of the Courland Pocket. This author believes that either the recollected dates are wrong or the account is reminiscent of another action which was not related to the award. Nevertheless, it presents an interesting account of the hard-fought battles of this period. Another post-war account, as related by **Erik Wallin,** concerning the battle that earned **Pehrsson** his decoration is as follows: **Wallin** was ordered to lead a patrol which stumbled upon a large concentration of enemy units preparing to storm the height. The patrol hurried back to report this intelligence to **Pehrsson**, who immediately forwarded the report to division HQ. They in turn provided him with direct support from all available artillery and, with this massive fire-power, the company managed to crush the attackers whilst still at their jumping-off positions. **Wallin** was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for this action.[300]

Another indication of this period of relative calm is the arrival of the last of the Swedish volunteers. **Arne Johansson,** a National Socialist father of three from Gothenburg, enlisted in 1943 and had previously served in a *SS* X-ray unit in Warsaw where he was also wounded. Transferred to the battalion upon his own request, he arrived around 20 October. Assigned to **Pehrsson's** half-track as MG-gunner, on 25 October he noted that a total of five Swedes served in his company and the military situation was quiet.[301]

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297 German document concerning the decoration of the *Ehrenblattspange* to *SS-Ostuf.* Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. "3./*SS*-Pz-AA11 bei Trekni am 16.-19.10.44". (NARA)

298 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, p. 265.

299 Poller, p. 166. The account of the Trekni Height battle is based on a 1978 letter from Franz Bereznyak .

300 Information from Bo B. who made several interviews with Erik Wallin (undated).

301 Letters from Arne Johansson to his wife, 19.10.44 and 25.10.44. (Author's archive)

Overall, the battalion had lost over 50% of its strength at the time of the first battle of the Courland Pocket. Indeed, its whole only counted 389 men on 15 October.[302] Thirty-one additional men were lost three days later.[303] It would, however, receive replacement and one month later the strength had increased to 543 officers and men.[304] A full-strength battalion, however, normally consisted of about 800 men.

Second Battle of Courland

With the end of the First Courland battle, German troops were given some respite to improve their positions and prepare for further Soviet assaults. It was clear the enemy would attack with a sizeable force in days to come. On 26 October, the enemy stormed the entrenchments held by *6./ Rgt. 'Danmark'* and managed to break through. However, the commitment of all available reserves forced the attackers back. The Second Battle of the Courland Pocket began on 7 October when the Red Army attempted to split the pocket in two with a major assault towards the centre of the German defences. *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was extremely hard hit. *Rgt. 'Norge'* was committed, but forced back after losing contact between the *II./Rgt.* and *III./Rgt.* This created a yawning gap on the Preekuln – Vainode railway.[305] *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, previously held as reserve, rushed forward to close the breach.

While no Swede had fallen during the battle of the Trekni Height, this changed during the second Courland battle. On 29 October, 3rd Company was pulled back and placed in a defensive line south and south-east of Preekuln. That same day a platoon from *2./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* came under enemy fire. Its commander, ***SS-Untersturmführer* Rune Ahlgren,** was killed whilst attempting to rescue a comrade.[306] The remains of the 27-year-old Swede were interred at Izriede Estate. The grave was later relocated to the war cemetery at Saldus, where it remains to this day.[307] **Ahlgren** had, during his lengthy service with the *SS*, been awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Some sources state he also had been promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer.* The German war grave authorities lists him as *SS Obersturmführer*. The latter rank is also noted on his grave, while the division casualty report lists him as *Untersturmführer.*[308]

***SS-Obersturmführer* Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** was wounded again the following day, but remained with the company.[309] Listed as badly wounded and serving in the *SS-Artillerie-Rgt. 11*, this information is more than likely incorrect – there are no records of him serving in any other unit. As the rain set in during the late October and early November, German and Soviet became bogged down. *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 11 'Hermann von Salza'* had been badly mauled, its combat value reduced substantially. The shattered remains were evacuated by boat from Liepaja on 10/11 November.[310] Some personnel, however, were transferred to other units and, this author believes, ***SS-Untersturmführer* Per-Sigurd Baecklund** was amongst them. **Erik Wallin** subsequently

302 NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0482.
303 NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0479.
304 NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0438.
305 Tieke, p.183.
306 *SS*-Untersturmführer Gösta Borg interview circa 1980-90, Lennart Westberg and NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0339-0340.
307 Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge; Rune Ahlgren lies in the Kriegsgräberstätte in Saldus (Latvia) Block L Row 6 Grave 108.
308 *SS* document concerning Rune Ahlgren, 'Dienstgrad *SS-Ustuf.*' erfolgte am 15 Juni 1944. (NARA)
309 NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0363-0364.
310 Tieke, p. 208.

claimed the former served with *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* during the full length of the division's stay in Courland. This was also confirmed by **Baecklund**. It is more than likely that both men simply forgot to reveal their short service with *'Hermann von Salza'* during interrogation.[311] That **Baecklund** actually served with *"Hermann von Salza"* at some point is clear when one considers the battalion commander remembered him as very capable officer. During November, both ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Erik Wallin** and ***SS-Panzergrenadier*** **Sven Nordqvist** were awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Some sources state that **Nordqvist** received the award after being wounded in the lung while pursuing a fleeing Soviet soldier.[312] He returned to Sweden in May 1945.[313]

Events at the front remained calm although fighting still took place. On 12 November, the Soviets attacked towards Purmatsi-Bunkas. The assault was however a complete failure and was beaten back. South of Purmatsi the enemy struck once again at the *III./Rgt 'Danmark'* and *SS-Panzergrenadier-Brigade 'Nederland'*.[314]

In late November another volunteer returned to the unit. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Heino Meyer**, wounded at Narwa in April 1944, left Greifswald hospital around 25 November. He wrote home to his parents that he longed to get back to the unit, but feared that many of the old fighters would be gone – killed or wounded.[315] On his way to the front he visited Danzig where he met ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gösta Borg** whom he had enlisted with in 1943. The young Swede observed that he hoped that some of his old Swedish comrades would remain in the unit, but also that he had heard two of the "best" had been wounded recently.[316] It is likely he returned at the beginning of December. According to **Erik Wallin** it was a joyful and unexpected event as he had been reported killed.

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 relieved *II./Rgt. 'Danmark'* on 7 December. The 5th Company took over from units of the latter at Purmatsi-Preekuln railway crossing on 12 December. Heavy snow and cold temperatures which sat in on 15 December heralded the close of the Second Battle of the Courland pocket.

The Third Battle of the Courland Pocket

The third Battle of the Courland Pocket began on 21 December. The Soviet objective was once again to cut the pocket in two by reaching the Frauenburg – Liepaja Road.[317] Just as in previous battles the defenders put up a fierce resistance until the enemy attacks petered out at the end of December. The Soviets struck at other sectors other than that of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. This contributed to a relatively calm Christmas. It was during this quiet period that **Heino Meyer** took the time to write home:

311 Interrogation with Per-Sigurd Baecklund 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA) and from Erik Stig Wallin to the Swedish police concerning other Swedish volunteers, 19.7.45. (RA)

312 Information most likely originating from Ingmar Somberg to Bosse B. Somberg's account should be viewed critically, as he is known to have related incorrect postbellum information and official documentation of related wartime service is difficult to trace.

313 50:6 / 4 A second volume. Swedish Nazi parties and abroad. *Waffen-SS*. (RA)

314 Tieke, p. 191.

315 Abstract from letter sent by Heino Meyer. Greifswald 23.11.44. (Bosse B. archive)

316 Abstract from letter sent by Heino Meyer. Danzig. 27.11.44. (Bosse B. archive)

317 Tieke, p.193.

A double exposed photo taken in Courland. Erik Wallin wears the Iron Cross ribbon and the membership badge of the *SSS SA* (protection squads). The other man is Sven Nordqvist. (Göran Hargestam)

Heino Meyer in August 1944. (Author's archive)

> Now we're sitting here around the small table in the bunker. On the table stands a little Christmas tree, which we have adorned with cotton balls and strips of tin cans. The Christmas light that mom gave me in Oslo is burning in front of me.
>
> Together with my commander, *SS Ostuf.* Gösta Pehrsson, I have been out to every man in the machine-gun and machine pistol positions and handed out presents.
>
> Every man got cookies, two chocolate cakes, stationery, toiletries, liqueurs, schnapps, cigarettes, tobacco, candles, *Weihnachtsstollen*, books, real coffee, etc. Most of my men are *volksdeutsche* from Romania, whose relatives' fate is so uncertain, yet the atmosphere is so good.
>
> Next to me is another boy from Stockholm. He's so quiet and still. In February, he heard the last from home and local ruffians have spread the rumor that he had fallen. His lonely parents are probably sitting just as quiet at home thinking of their son whose fate for them is so uncertain. He, Erik Wallin and I are doing well and wish his father and mother happy New Year with joyful reunion. Mom must call his parents: Erik Wallin, Lilla Nygatan 20, tel: 112176 and greet them. As Erik is a very nice boy, I hope you will do everything you can. He is a mortar squad leader.

The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* held the sector on both sides of the Preekuln – Vainode railway. On 29 December, they relocated to the ruined village of Bunkas, where they would spend New Years'. Preekuln was held *4./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Between both companies was the heavy company of *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Battalion replacements arriving between 18 November and 30 December failed to make up for the incredibly high losses. The unit reported a combat strength of some 273 men at the close of the year.[318]

Year's End 1944-45

From 31 December 1944, it is quite easy to follow the doings of *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Shortly after the war **Thorolf Hillblad,** a Swede who served as *Kriegsberichter* for a short while in 1941 and later managed the local *SSS*-office in Berlin, wrote *Twilight of the Gods* based on the stories told by **Erik Wallin**. The book is about his experiences with 3rd and later the 5th companies at the end of the war. New Year's Eve for **Pehrsson's** company included an unusual aspect: The Company was dug in at the tiny hamlet of Bunkas with the frontline extending along a nearby railway. That same day, **Pehrsson** ordered **Wallin** to destroy a Soviet machine-gun nest with his mortars the next day. Whilst reconnoitring the line, he overheard an unusual commotion emanating from the Soviet lines. The Russians had been issued extra vodka rations to celebrate and were intoxicated. On their enemy's invitation, they crossed the intervening ground to celebrate. German and Soviet soldiers bartered in the middle of no man's land before the calm was broken by a confused sentry who unexpectedly discharged his weapon from a nearby foxhole. Failing to perceive exactly what was happening, he imagined an attack was imminent. Both sides quickly returned to their positions. The following morning, as **Pehrsson** had ordered, the machine-gun nest was destroyed.[319]

It was, taking advantage of the prevailing quietude, deemed necessary to clarify the local military situation. On 2 January a prisoner snatch was ordered to gain intelligence. A squad consisting of eight men from *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* failed in the first attempt when one of the raiders was killed by mine. The enemy now alerted, the remainder quickly fell back. On 4 January, the company was withdrawn for a few days of rest before returning to the front near Preekuln, where the left flank was covered by the remnants of a much reduced 1st Company consisting of 15-20 men.

318 NARA T-312 / R-971 / F-0390.
319 Wallin, Hillblad, pp. 20 ff.

Axel Ahlberg was wounded in January 1945 and sent to a hospital in Hannover. He claimed to have been one of the last Estonian-Swedes remaining with the company; the remainder having fled to Sweden during 1944.[320] There may be some truth in this. Conversely, it is quite difficult to find corroborative evidence in Swedish archives concerning the Estonian-Swedes, as the police took little interest in investigating their *SS* service. At least one, **Arthur Brandt,** remained with the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* while **Ahlberg** ended up with a *Kampfgruppe* that fought the Russians and Americans in Austria before being captured. The odyssey ended 13 months later when he returned to Sweden.

A single Soviet prisoner was finally obtained during a subsequent raid on 12 January. He could only confirm suspicions that another Soviet assault was imminent. Around the same time, however, ***SS-Sturmbannführer*** **Rudolf Saalbach** received the message the entire Corps had prayed for – they would be rescued from almost certain destruction and evacuated back to Germany at the end of the month. The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was relieved on 13 January and moved closer to the much quieter Preekuln sector. While there they prepared for the coming fourth Courland Pocket battle that finally commenced on 23 January. Previous to this, the volunteers' happy expectations were confirmed when a *Wehrmacht* unit relieved them on the 20th. Embarking shortly thereafter, the company arrived in the German harbour town of Stettin on the 22nd.[321]

THE LAST BATTLES: POMERANIA TO BERLIN, JANUARY – MAY 1945

Two days after the departure from Libau, *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* disembarked in the Pomeranian port city of Stettin. The company was one of the first corps units to reach Germany; the remainder would be shipped out during the following weeks. The condition of *'Nordland' Division* on reaching the Reich was nothing more than battered remnants. Despite the fact that bled-white remnants of *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps* were evacuated from the Courland Pocket did not mean they would escape complete annihilation, only that the last desperate battles would take place on German soil instead of Latvian.[322]

3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 was down to just a handful of Swedish volunteers, the battalion having suffered heavy losses during the last months fighting in the Courland Pocket. In desperate need of reinforcements, there would be no more Swedish volunteers to join the Battalion except for one individual returning from hospital. The remaining few were as follows:

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, *SS-Obersturmführer* and company commander.
Erik Wallin, *SS-Unterscharführer* and platoon leader of 4th heavy platoon, 3rd Company.
Frans Wahlberg, *SS-Unterscharführer*, unknown assignment.
Heino Meyer, *SS-Untersturmführer*, Platoon leader, 1st Platoon, 3rd Company.
Arne Johansson, serving on **Pehrsson's** halftrack.
Ragnar Johansson II, driver on **Pehrsson's** halftrack.
Per-Sigurd Baecklund, *SS-Untersturmführer*, unknown assignment.
Arthur Brandt (Estonian-Swede) Half-track driver, 3rd Company. Whether or not any other Estonian-Swedes were attached to the company remains uncertain.

Ten days prior to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* disembarkment, the Red Army launched a winter offensive that broke through the Narew-Weichsel Line. To the south, the enemy reached Lower Silesia,

320 Westberg, Gyllenhaal, p. 293.
321 Poller, p. 197.
322 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 38.

from where it was to continue through Posen to Frankfurt an der Oder. The Soviets were overwhelmingly superior in both men (4 to 1 in manpower) and material. To add to this misery, the totally unqualified ***Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler** was appointed commander of the defending Reserve Army on 23 January. Tasked with creating defences between the Weichsel and Oder rivers, the Nazi grandee had no experience of combat in either world war. *2. Armee*, forced to retreat to the East Prussian city of Königsberg, was cut off while bitter fighting raged around Danzig simultaneously. The enemy drive in the vicinity of the lower Weichsel, however, had been temporarily halted.

There would, for the few remaining volunteers in *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, be two weeks of rest and recovery. During this time ***SS-Untersturmführer* Per-Sigurd Baecklund** departed from the unit and was transferred to *SS-Feld-Ersatz-Btl. 11* where he came to serve as the battalion commander's orderly.[323] The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* was sent northeast to Freiheide which was situated approximately 8 kilometers from the town Massow. The corps was, in the immediate aftermath of the heavy fighting that raged throughout 1944, in desperate need of reconstruction prior to commitment against **Marshalk Georgij Zjukovs'** northern flank. The popular commander of *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps*, **Felix Steiner**, was given a new assignment: to raise and commit the newly-formed *11. Panzer-Armee* in eastern Pomerania. He was replaced by **Generalleutnant Martin Unrein** of *14.Panzer Division*. The remainder of the corps sailed out of Courland together with three *Wehrmacht* infantry divisions and one panzer division at the end of January.

3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 used the rest period to train during the day; evenings were set aside for social functions with the friendly local inhabitants who organized dances. On other evenings the company hosted comrade nights that lacked the standard entertainment provided by **Ragnar Johansson I**. **Wallin** believed him to be the strongest man in the division. Indeed, the powerful volunteer could bend horse shoes and hit nails through thick oak planks with his bare fists. These calm days would soon be over as Soviet battlefield successes led to the company's return to the frontline.[324]

Among the other parts of the division shipped out early from Courland was *SS-Panzer-Abteilung 11 'Hermann von Salza'*, which left Latvia in November 1944 in order to be rebuilt. In late January 1945 it arrived at the Grafenwöhr training grounds in southern Germany. This was where the corps was formed in summer 1943. Their stay there proved short-lived and they were entrained for Pomerania shortly after arrival.

Soviet units advancing between the Weichsel and the Oder moved slowly westwards. On 4 February the Red Army reached the Ihna River southwest of Zachan. That same day the defenders of Arnswalde gained much needed reinforcements from the *Schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 503,* or the 'Heavy *SS*-Panzer-Battalion 503' –equipped with heavy *Königstiger* tanks. The battalion had originally been raised to form a second battalion of what would have been a tank regiment attached to *'Nordland' Division*. Amongst those who had acted as instructors was volunteer **Hans Lindström**, who previously served at the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin.[325] The newly arrived unit would later serve side by side with the volunteers in *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. For his part, **Lindström,** having been accepted at the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz***,** would not participate in the forthcoming fighting.

On 7 February, the enemy succeeded in breaking into Reetz. Faced with stiff resistance, savage battles still raged northeast of the town two days later. Around the same time, the bulk of the unit's corps formations approached Pomerania by sea. Following embarkation they moved to Massow to regroup and enjoy a few days of rest. *'Nederland'-Brigade* had, by this time, been reorganized into a division, but at this stage of the war it proved an impossible task beyond what was set on paper.

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323 Interrogation of Per Sigurd Baecklund, 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)

324 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 40.

325 Based on a photograph of Hans Lindström in which the numbers '503' are discernable on shoulder straps, and *Lebenslauf.* (Author's archive)

Ragnar Johansson I, the strongest man in *'Nordland' Division.* (Author's archive)

Meanwhile, the enemy continued offensive operations against Reetz and Arnswalde. The latter was cut off on 12 February. Its garrison, inhabitants plus a large number of refugees faced an uncertain fate. The defenders, despite numerous attempts to force a capitulation, refused to surrender. At the same time, a German counter-offensive against the exposed Soviet northern flank was well under way. On 14 February, '*Nordland' Division* received orders to prepare '*Operation Sonnewende'* which would commence two days later. Third company was the only company from the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* to participate. The counter-stroke was, however, mostly a failure. The only real success was when the attackers managed to temporarily break the ring around Arnswalde, thus allowing thousands of the besieged to escape westwards. The desperate counter-offensive subsequently bogged down and was called off on 19 February. Two days later the order came to abandon Arnswalde and establish a new line of defense south of Staargard.

At the same time, Soviet forces prepared for the forthcoming offensive designed to split *Heeresgruppe Weichsel* with a thrust towards Stettin that would crush *III. Germ. SS-Pz-Korps*. On the 1 March, the corps was subjected to a heavy barrage followed by infantry assaults along the entire front. *'Nordland' Division* was forced to make a fighting withdrawal during which *3./ SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* sustained another volunteer casualty: **Arne Johansson**, a father of three from Gothenburg, who had served on **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson's** command half-track since October 1944. Both **Erik Wallin** and **Heino Meyer** were present during the fatal incident. **Wallin** related the following details in a postwar account:

> A man was sent out to aid Arne Johansson after he was wounded by shrapnel. He was killed almost immediately by the Russians. Another group was dispatched and met the same fate. Finally, Johansson was retrieved only to be wounded once again. Seven to eight men fell during this episode (in total). Johansson lingered on a while but died of his wounds. His final words were "I hope I have behaved like a good Swede...

His wife, not hearing a word from since the previous February, would not discover his tragic fate until after the war when she wrote to the Swedish Foreign Ministry in May 1945.[326]

326 Letter from Arne Johansson's wife to Swedish Foreign Ministry, 14.5.45. (Author's archive)

Arne Johansson, a father of three from Gothenburg who was the last Swedish volunteer to join the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. He was killed in action in Pomerania. (Author's archive)

The battalion was put on alert status the next day. Its mission was to keep the road open for companies of *Nederland-Division* to pull back from Reetz towards Freienwalde. The battalion, after having successfully carried out this task, withdrew towards Vossberg to regroup. The village was, however, nothing but a trap and the unit soon found itself surrounded by enemy tanks. The situation appeared bleak until a *Königstiger* from s.*SS-Pz-Abt 503* emerged to provide support and the battalion managed to break out. The race continued westwards but, just a few days after the loss of **Arne Johansson**, platoon leader ***SS-Untersturmführer* Heino Meyer** was seriously wounded**.** He was found along the road by **Erik Wallin**, who recalled the event in his classic *Twilight of the Gods:*

> Two kilometers ahead there was a small group of *SS* men who stood and looked at a bloody heap at the side of the road. As we decreased our speed and I looked down, a hand raises to me and waves. The half-track halts and I hear an unclear voice call my name. Christ! It is my countryman *Untersturmführer* Meyer, the company favorite![327]

Meyer had been wounded on both 1 and 2 March; this was his third wound in just three days. The first two had been light and he had remained with the company, but the last was severe – he had been shot in the back and chest and, in addition, been hit by several pieces of shrapnel, one of which split his jaw and stuck in the neck.[328] The seriously wounded Swede was brought to an aid station, where he attempted to make a report to ***SS-Sturmbannführer* Rudolf Saalbach**. **Meyer** was evacuated to a field hospital and, on hearing of his injury, his uncle, a doctor and commander

327 Wallin, Hillblad, pp. 61ff.

328 Abstract: Heino Meyer letter. 11.3.45. Meiningen. (Bosse B. archive)

SS-Untersturmführer Heino Meyer. (Author's archive)

of a *Luftwaffe* hospital in Griefswald, had him moved to the latter place. This was the same hospital where he was treated following his wound in April 1944. His uncle had him evacuated to Norway on one of the last ships as the enemy drew closer. From there he made his way back to Sweden.[329]

Vossberg fell to the enemy the same afternoon as **Meyer** was wounded. The defenses of Staargard and Freienwalde held out, but the fronts between these places collapsed. The retreat westward continued toward Sassenhagen and Sassenburg. These towns could not be held either and the Red Army soon occupied the southern portion of Sassenburg when **Saalbach** ordered his Danish orderly **Mogens Schwarz** to lead the Battalion towards Falkenberg. Staargard fell to the enemy at noon; the Soviets were now in position to cut the main supply artery.

That night the Battalion regrouped and continued their retreat to the south-west. Soviet forces, however, managed however to bypass them by utilizing the incomplete Autobahn which was not recorded on German maps and thus unknown to the retreating men of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. Savage fighting raged around the Autobahn throughout 6 March, as *Rgt. 'Norge'* conducted a fighting withdrawal towards Wachlin. *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* acted as rearguard.

John-Ragnar Gustavsson – A Swede in 'Nederland'

There was, in addition to the Swedish volunteers of *'Nordland' Division*, at least one Swedish-born *SS* officer serving with '*Nederland'* during the final months of the war. His name was **Johan-Ragnar Gustavsson,** a Swedish citizen (b. Norway 1924) who had seen combat with the *'Wiking' Division* and participated in the officer candidate course *14. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* at Bad Tölz

329 Letter from Heino Meyer's brother. 19.1.97 and Krankenblatt, Heino Meyer. (Bosse B. archive)

SS-Untersturmführer Johan-Ragnar Gustavsson (far left). (Geir Brenden)

commencing in May 1944. There he was listed as a member of *SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Ausb. u. Ers Bat 11 'Nordland'.* Thus it is possible he was slated for service with *'Nordland'* following graduation.[330] But, as the division was cut off in Courland pocket at that time when he graduated, he was instead posted to the NCO school at the *Truppubnüngsplatz Hammerstein* in Pomerania with the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer*.

Gustavsson participated in combat after the school was formed into a *Kampfgruppe* at the close of January 1945. The *Kampfgruppe* was dissolved one month later after which he transferred to *SS-Panzergrenadier-Rgt. 48 'General Seyffardt'* which had been rebuilt after annihilation in Narwa during summer of 1944. **Gustavsson** and his comrades requested to be transferred to *'Nordland'*, but this proved impossible. He was instead transferred to *I./Rgt. 'General Seyffardt'* as platoon leader. Following training and preparations, the unit moved towards Massow on 3 March in order to establish a new main line of resistance. **Gustavsson** was subsequently killed in the vicinity around 5 or 6 March.[331] He might have had an chance to escaped this fate as a contract expiration letter had reached him a few weeks earlier. It is said that the unfortunate recipient responded by tearing up it up, as he did not want to "abandon the sinking ship and leave his comrades in the lurch".[332]

330 Student enrolment list 14 Kriegsjunkerlehrgang Bad Tölz. (NARA/BDC)

331 'Story of Kampfgruppe Scheibe and the I./Gen. Seyffardtt'. Ole Peterssen. (Author's archive)

332 Information provided by Gustavsson's Norwegian fiancée, field nurse Inger Skogstad, as related by Geir Brenden. (Author's archive)

The Battle of Altdamm

The battles around the Autobahn continued on 7 March with German formations being pushed back westwards as they desperately tried to shore up the new main line of resistance only to see it overrun before being properly consolidated. Patrols by *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were sent out on a daily basis in order to discover the enemy's next objective. Hard-pressed German forces, on being pressed back as far as the Stettin suburb of Altdamm, finally managed to prepare a bridgehead and dig-in. In the midst of the burnt-out city, **Erik Wallin** was decorated with the silver Close Combat Clasp by **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson**.[333] The fight for the city was fierce and brutal, something which **Wallin** described graphically in *Twilight of the Gods:*

> The bridgehead was pressed back under the continuous Red onslaught to form a hedgehog position of the type which we had seen many times during the two-year retreat from Russia. Only one connection – the bridge over the River Oder to Stettin – remains. The main battle line runs only a few hundred metres from the Altdamm city limits. Day and night the Russian artillery hammer our positions and Altdamm itself, where everything is in ruins with a thick black-brown veil of smoke that blankets the entire area. Sleep is unthinkable when the ground shakes as an earthquake and the air thunders and vibrates with whizzing and exploding shells. Torn and dirty, bearded soldiers' faces are wherever you look. Supplies arrive irregularly despite the fact there is plenty of available food in Stettin and Altdamm. Ration parties are more than once wiped out by shellfire whilst going forward.
>
> But you can live with the hunger. The fatigue is worse. Eyes sting and the whole face becomes stiff. There is not a single calm sanctuary in this burning and exploding inferno, where the cries of the wounded are heard between frequent shell bursts. Shells hail down everywhere with their devastating blast waves and tearing rains of shrapnel. Walls collapse over advancing units or wounded on their way to aid stations. Cemented basements collapse as toys and our bunkers become death traps as projectiles with delayed fuses from the Bolshevik 12cm mortars manage to penetrate roofs before exploding with their razor blade-like shrapnel."[334]

The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* temporarily lost their respected Swedish company commander on 8 March when **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson's** bunker took a direct hit. Two men from his half-track were killed, while **Pehrsson** was wounded. He was evacuated to Stettin by his faithful orderly **Franz Bereznyak** and subsequently awarded the silver Wound Badge.[335]

Altdamm was, despite a tenacious defence, abandoned on direct orders from **Hitler,** the heavily-contested bridgehead being evacuated on the night 19/20 March; the contested Oder bridge was blown to pieces shortly afterwards. Four days later, whilst assessing the divisional strength, it was noted that '*Nordland's*' manpower strength was down to approximately 4,000 men, although *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* still had 78 half-tracks at their disposal. The situation calmed down somewhat after the withdrawal west of the Oder. German units gained a much-needed opportunity to recover while the Red Army prepared for 'Operation Berlin' – the final push to capture the Third Reich's capitol.

333 Erik Wallin short autobiography. Undated, post-war. (Author's archive)
334 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 74.
335 Agte, p. 125.

Rest on the Oder Front – Changes within *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*

The crossing of the Oder meant that the last natural obstacle before Berlin had been traversed. A collapse on this front meant the direct route to Berlin lay open to the invaders. The defenders therefore remained, despite the prevailing quiet, active constructing new positions, bringing up newly-raised formations and preparing for the onslaught to come. Most formations/units received drafts of *Hitlerjugend* or elderly *Volksturm* as much-needed replacements. If it was strange to encounter soldiers – either too young or too old – who had been pressed into service at the last moment, it was nothing compared to reinforcement oddities that joined the *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*: former British prisoners of war were assigned to one of the company half-tracks. This motley collection made up what was known as the '*Brittisch Freikorps*'. **Himmler** had hoped to form a volunteer unit consisting of anti-communist prisoners of war to fight on the Eastern front. Only a handful enlisted and, although fewer in number than the Swedish volunteers, were of great propaganda coup. The new volunteers wore specially designed insignia, **Erik Wallin** recollecting the strange sight of *SS* men sporting the Union Jack on their sleeves. It was, following a visit by **Felix Steiner**, decided to send them westwards in order to spare them from being sacrificed in the final desperate struggle. They were subsequently captured by the Western Allies.

During this period several changes resulting from heavy losses took place within *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*. The 3rd and 4th companies, like the earlier amalgamation of 1st and 2nd, merged to form a single company. **Erik Wallin** moved from 3rd to the 5th company with his mortar platoon where he would act as platoon leader for the remainder of the war. **Ragnar Johansson I,** previously wounded in September 1944, returned only to be attached to the supply section.[336] **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson**, having recovered from the wound sustained at Altdamm, returned 15 April. Promoted to *SS-Hauptsturmführer*, he became the highest-ranking Swede in the *Waffen SS*.[337]

Operation Berlin – the Last Battles in Pomerania

The Oder front remained quiet until 16 April. On that date the Soviet high command launched 'Operation Berlin'. The large-scale offensive which hit *LVI. Panzer-Korps* on the Seelow Heights east of Berlin began unfavourably for the Red Army. The defenders' forward positions were evacuated prior to the preliminary barrage which hit empty positions before hasty reoccupation. A large quantity of anti-aircraft searchlights intended to blind the dug-in German forces were in place before zero hour. These proved ineffective due to the large clouds of dust and smoke that shrouded the light and blinded the advancing infantry. Attacking Soviet forces, reinforced by considerable manpower assets, were eventually able to achieve a breakthrough despite the slow start. *'Nordland' Division*, in reserve around Angermünde, was ordered to march west of the Seelow Heights on the evening of 17 April.[338]

The newly-promoted **Pehrsson** was transferred from *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* that same day, Assigned to the division staff, he assumed duties as a *1C* – or divisional intelligence officer. Given the unenviable task to gather enough precious fuel to make the division mobile again, his predecessor later erroneously claimed this was a necessary preliminary to moving the division northwards in order to escape certain destruction.[339] Simultaneously, ferocious battles around Frankfurt

336 Information provided by Erik Stig Wallin to Swedish police concerning Swedish volunteers, 19.7.45 (RA)

337 Letter from H.G. Pehrsson to King Gustaf V concerning further service in the Swedish army. Undated. (Author's archive)

338 T-78 / R-305 / F-0714-0715, 0751 (F-0739) (NARA).

339 Letter from G.G. to Lennart Westberg, 1987.

and Freienwalde reached their peak of savagery, the enemy charging furiously behind a crushing artillery barrage that created deep and exploitable rents in *LVI. Panzer-Korps'* defenses. According to a brief message from *3. Panzer-Armee*, *'Nordland' Division* began to move forward along two distinct routes at midnight. On the 'eastern route', units marched as follows: *Rgt. 'Norge',* disparate artillery elements, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and remainder of the artillery. On the western route': *Rgt. 'Danmark'*, *SS-Pz-Rgt. 11* and *SS-Flak-Abt 11*. Lack of fuel caused the division to stall north of Strausberg. The movement was also effected by strafing enemy planes which, having gained complete air superiority could swoop down with impunity on the stationary German columns.[340]

9. Armee could report that a total of 317 enemy tanks had been knocked out since the Soviet offensive began. *LVI. Panzer-Korps'* held but it had undergone near-fatal blows. During the afternoon the enemy pressed forward wide-ranging armored columns along the Küstrin – Seelow Road. Gussow was captured and the enemy also managed to gain additional territory to the west and southwest before turning northwest, whereupon Platkow fell into enemy hands.

The Soviet assaults continued throughout the 18th. In *LVI. Panzer-Korps'* sector, the Red Army assaulted Trepnitz, Obersdorf and Hermannsdorf from Wulkow. A total of 157 Soviet tanks were destroyed, but the general situation – desperate as far as the German defenders were concerned – remained unchanged. An evening situation report observed that the heaviest pressure was against *II. SS-Panzer-Korps* and *LVI. Panzer-Korps*. Heavy tank battles raged in the Reichenberg – Batzlow sector, and it was here that *'Nordland' Division* was to halt the seemingly irresistible Red Army. The division was now attached to *LVI. Panzer-Korps.*[341] A divisional communique timed 11.15 a.m. stated it was stranded without fuel, which they started gathering about one hour later.[342]

Erik Wallin's platoon reached Hohenstein at dawn on 19 April. Ordered to converge with s.*SS-Pz-Abt 503* in an armored assault against the Seelow heights later that same day, the move was aborted and *'Nordland' Division* was instead dispatched to the northern flank between Prötzel and Schermutzelsee to plug a yawning gap between *LVI. Panzer-Korps* and *CI. Armee-Korps.* A devastating Soviet artillery and rocket barrage completely disrupted the impromptu operation. This black day was vividly recalled by **Erik Wallin** in a postwar account:

> In the village everything was quiet and peaceful. Everyone found a place to rest and the houses were filled with sleeping comrades. I grew numb shortly afterwards. The driver slept in his seat.
>
> A terrible roar as if the ground opened up in a volcanic outburst awoke us with a powerful shaking. This was followed by close and repeated explosions in our immediate surroundings. I awoke quickly and stuck my head out of the half-track.
>
> A terrible sight! The recently peaceful village was, in just a few moments, transformed into a hell which defies every attempt at description. Salvo after salvo from Stalin organs and heavy artillery created a horrible bloodbath. Close bursting shells spouted from the village street and houses collapsed. Everywhere flames rose from windows and licked walls and the roofs. Rushing men exited terrified through doors and windows, others came staggering with their hands over heads or covering their torn open stomachs where intestines seeped out through clenched fingers. Others slid with one or both legs cut off. Many more remained inside the burning houses, dead or dying. Of those who managed to get out, there was more than one who only managed to take a few staggering steps before falling to never rise again. Through the explosive crashes rose desperate, wild cries of death and helpless moaning … The entire

340 T-311 / R-169 / F-1455 and T-311 / R-169 (NARA).
341 T-311 / R-169 / F-1431 (NARA).
342 T-311 / R-169 / F-1462 (NARA).

> force, a potential battering ram against the Bolshevik bridgehead, was now nothing more than shattered remains. The anticipated assault had been shot to pieces before it started. Our reconnaissance battalion, a nucleus with few equals on the entire Eastern front, experienced one of its bloodiest days during the whole war. All of this occurred within just a dozen minutes, if even that. In situations like this one loses all sense of time.[343]

The deadly barrage killed the temporary company commander and two platoon leaders before it was over. **Wallin's** platoon lost twelve men and of 10 mortar half-tracks – only 4 remained. After fleeing the village he came across a section of unit half-tracks waiting to collect stragglers. Wounded were placed on the vehicles before withdrawing to discover the remnants of the battalion. **Wallin** remembered: "The dam had burst. As a balloon shatters, when the inside air pressure becomes too much for the thin cover, the Bolshevik bridgehead at Küstrin – after several days of preparations with as many troops that could possibly fit within that confined space – shattered the German positions". *'Nordland' Division's* fate had been sealed; the transfer to the *LVI. Panzer-Korps* was to be succeeded by inevitable doom. On the following day ***Reichsführer-SS*** **Heinrich Himmler** sent what was probably his last personal message addressed to the *Nederland* and *'Nordland' Division*. In abrupt sentences he described what was expected of formations now fighting for their existence:

> You stand before the decisive battle in the east. There is no retreat or withdrawal. You need to hold out to the last man or attack. The fate of Europe is in your hands. Think of your fallen comrades and the millions of Germanic women and children. I expect reckless fighting and fulfillment of your duties. –. H. Himmler.

Defensive positions about Altlandsberg were maintained throughout 21-24 April, after which the retreat into Berlin proper began. ***SS-Unterscharführer*** **Frans Wahlberg,** who had participated in several previous conflicts before enlisting in the *Waffen-SS,* was captured on 21 April. His story was related to *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* shortly after his release from Soviet captivity:

> Our unit took part in the defence of Reinickendorf on April 21 1945. It was hopeless. Everything was one big mess. Everyone tried to escape to Berlin. After a few hours, I heard a sudden shoot out with anti-tank guns, and saw flames erupt from our *Sturmgeschütze*. A strong detonation followed shortly afterwards. I understood that something terrible had happened and when all was quiet went back. It was as I feared: the *Sturmgeschütze* was a fuming scrap-head with burned corpses surrounding it.[344]

Wahlberg was advised to surrender after a brief firefight. His captors tore off his decorations and sent him to the rear. Imprisoned near Leningrad, he returned to Sweden in 1946. Authorities subsequently remarked that the former captive was very thin and in bad health.[345]

The first roadsigns denoting the environs of 'Gross Berlin' were visible to ***SS-Unterscharführer*** **Erik Wallin** a few days after **Adolf Hitler's** final birthday. Corps' units headed southeast to defences due east of Tempelhof Airport. The pursuing Red Army was not the only menace according to **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson**:

343 Wallin, Hillblad, p.110.

344 *Den svenske folksocialisten*, 1946. (KB)

345 Interrogation of Frans Rudolf Alfonso Wahlberg. 1.6.46. P4820. (RA)

German troops were pushed back further and further and the speed of the retreat, culminating in the final battles for Berlin in late April 1945, grew more and more. The *Gestapo* exercised an excruciating psychological pressure through continual arrests and transfers of old front-fighters and officers, deemed unreliable for one reason or another, during these days. Many officers were shot on the spot by these police squads.[346]

THE BATTLE OF BERLIN – "A SIMMERING AND BOILING HELL OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION"

The Battle of Berlin was the definitive symbol of the downfall of the Third Reich. Several Swedish volunteers were involved in the fighting in one way or another, thus this last section will not only examine the soldiers of *'Nordland' Division*, but also other Swedes who were in Berlin at the time.

Of the last three volunteers working at the *SS-Hauptamt*, only ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Olof Sandström** remained. ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Sven Rydén** had been murdered and ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf, Sandström's** associate, had been arrested as the primary suspect for said murder.[347] When the *SS-Hauptamt* left Berlin in April 1945, **Sandström** remained but considered his service in the *SS* complete. He made an attempt to leave the city but, unable to make his way northwards, he was forced to turn back and would thus experience the battle as a civilian.[348] **Gunnar Eklöf** also made his way back to the capitol at the end of April.[349] Released from prison as the Red Army approached, the accused murderer was never sentenced, but it was an article of faith amongst the volunteers that he had killed his fellow countryman. One claimant of the story's veracity was **Ragnar Johansson II**, a driver within the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* who subsequently fell during the battle.

Eklöf, during his service as liaison officer, often reported other volunteers for cowardice. This was in response to their attempts to seek discharge via him, forcing them to remain in *SS* service. The accuser was however later accused of cowardice as, on reaching Berlin, he sought sanctuary with his wife in a Swedish church where they would wait out the combat. Employed as a janitor, he was made responsible for the protection of the extraterritorial church grounds.[350]

Meanwhile, the unit which he had served with for a few weeks during summer of 1944, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* rattled towards a soon-to-be-encircled Berlin. On 23 April 1945, Soviet forces closed in around the city. A large gap of about 25 kilometres was all that remained before Berlin was completely sealed off. Fierce fighting raged on the outskirts until the following day when **Marshall Ivan Koniev** commenced his large-scale assault by crossing the Teltow Canal south of the city with 3rd Guards Tank Army and 28th Army.

Wallin and his mortar crews of *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* went into action at the Karlhorst Racecourse in southern Berlin. With weapons situated in the middle of the field, they opened fire while Soviet artillery rounds tore the stables around to pieces. There **Wallin** witnessed the

346 Report concerning chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

347 Telegram from Thorolf Hillblad to Erik Rundkvist. 2000 (Author's archive) and information from Erik Gunnar Eklöfs police folder. P3592. (RA)

348 Report on events associated with Berlin's defensive battles, surrender and return journey to Sweden. 23.7.45. P4151. (RA)

349 Interrogation of Erik Gunnar Eklöf. 8.10.45. P3592. (RA)

350 Ibid. and Report of events associated with Berlin's defensive battles, surrender and return journey to Sweden. 23.7.45. P4151. (RA)

extreme brutality of the enemy as two comrades came running with a young woman who, beaten and raped by Soviet soldiers, begged her fellow countrymen to shoot her. The material powers of the enemy overcame all resistance, and the track was soon surrounded and overrun, thus forcing the defenders to break out.[351] The next defended locality was established in the Swedish firm's ASEA factory complex. This large series of industrial structures, dominating the surrounding area, offered, with its thick walls, an ideal strongpoint position**.** From here the defenders could sustain direct hits but, as the enemy commenced a bombardment with heavy artillery, the factory was subsequently evacuated. Temporary positions were occupied, but in most cases they could not be held for much longer than one hour. The enemy pushed hard against the bled-white units, forcing them to retreat into the depths of the ruined city. They were, according to **Wallin**, forced back to Berlin-Lichtenberg before finally being dispatched southwards toward Tempelhof airport. The headlong advance proceeded along the burning Frankfurter Allee – Skalitzer Strasse – Gitschiner Strasse – Belle-Alliance Strasse, to the airfield fuel station.[352] While in the process of refuelling, **Wallin** encountered fellow Swede **Ragnar Johansson II,** who was surprised to see **Wallin**. Indeed, it had been rumoured that he had been previously killed in action at Küstrin. The two comrades shared a smoke and a drink of *Danziger Goldwasser* before parting – it would be the last they saw each other. Both men were to participate in a counter-attack south of Tempelhof at Britz which had been captured by **Koniev's** armoured troops. The march proceeded along the Dorfstrasse and Germaniastrasse under sporadic fire by Soviet artillery. The German guns replied with a preparatory barrage, after which a counter-attack with heavy *Königstiger* tanks and supporting infantry hurled themselves at the enemy. This was the last time **Wallin** would witness a concerted German armoured assault. The gap in the front was closed and the situation restored, at least temporarily. **Wallin** later observed:

> As a forward fire observer for a large number of mortars hastily brought together, I was far advanced in a ruin with my field phone. Here it was fairly quiet. The battle was much worse on the left. There everything was shrouded in a huge pillar of smoke from which it flashed all the time. I could see the Russian tanks rolling forward with frequent lightning shooting out of gun tubes. Between and behind them were crawling and running infantry. Smoke and soil spouted up in the middle of all this. German shells struck home. Buildings were burning out there and heavy fighting continued all around.[353]

The encirclement of Berlin was achieved by 25 April; the final phase of the battle had begun. The main Soviet thrust was directed towards the city centre, while another assault struck the Neukölln sector where *'Nordland' Division* was situated. Around mid-day, the positions in Britz had to be given up and the retreat continued across the Teltow Canal towards Neukölln. **Wallin** and his crew advanced along the Hermannstrasse towards the north in an attempt to reach a new assembly area at Stadtmitte underground station. '*Nordland's'* defences extended from Dönhoff Square, Kammandantenstrasse, Alexanderstrasse and Hallesches Port to Belle-Alliance Platz.[354]

That same day, divisional commander ***SS-Brigadeführer*** **Joachim Ziegler** was replaced by ***SS-Brigadeführer*** **Dr Gustav Krukenberg**. **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** was also removed from his position as divisional 1C. Returning to *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, he once again assumed the role of company commander.

351 Wallin, Hillblad, pp. 161ff.
352 Wallin, p. 166.
353 Ibid, p. 170.
354 Poller, p. 247.

SS-Unterscharführer Sten Eriksson. (Author's archive)

The amount of Swedes remaining within the Division was low. **Ragnar Johansson II** was still serving as **Pehrsson's** driver. Serving on another half-track was Estonian-Swede **Arthur Brandt**. **Ragnar Johansson I**, confronting the same fate as **Alfons Wahlberg**, had been captured east of Berlin while serving with the battalion supply section.[355] ***SS-Untersturmführer* Per-Sigurd Baecklund**, serving as orderly for the commander of *SS-Feld-Ers-Bat 11*, was moving westwards in order to surrender to the Anglo-Americans.[356] **Sten Eriksson,** the *SS-Kriegsberichter* who served with the Battalion in Estonia during 1944, crossed the Oder and joined the *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 24 'Danmark'* as a runner, giving up his previous assignment as war correspondent. **Wallin**, still serving with *5./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* was sent to the supply section situated at Grunewald. There he was ordered to gather troops for a new mortar unit.

Adolf Hitler, still hoping for a relief offensive by **Felix Steiner's** forces, ordered *'Nordland'* and *Panzer Division 'Münchenberg'* to counter-attack the Red Army breakthrough around Neukölln and Tempelhof Airport.

The attack, commencing in the early morning hours of 26 April, encountered fierce resistance. The *'Münchenberg'* division's assault on the airfield was soon brought to a halt. French *SS* volunteers of *SS-Battalion 'Fenet'* were gearing up, together with tanks from *'Nordland',* at the Hermannstrasse and Hermannsplatz. The assault went somewhat better despite the bitter house-to-house fighting. The headlong counter-attack managed to regain some territory but the assault

355 P.M. concerning the metalworker Nils Ragnar Johansson. 27.2.47. XII 83/Ä. 632. (RA).

356 Interrogation of Per-Sigurd Baecklund. 22.8.45. XII 83/ Ä3806. (RA)

was called off following the failure of '*Münchenberg*' at 07:00 hours. Meanwhile, Soviet assaults towards the heart of the city placed increased pressure on the hard-pressed German defenders and forced them to pull back toward the system of inner-city canals.[357] That evening, fanatical French volunteers continued to resist the Soviets at the Hermannsplatz until around midnight, when they finally withdrew to the Anhalter Bahnhof, the remains of several burnt out Soviet tanks being left behind.[358]

Wallin managed to gather four half-tracks and 20 soldiers by dawn on the 27th. This small force then proceeded down the main line which by then ran south of Hermannsplatz. Here **Wallin** was ordered to take up position with his mortars in order to lay down fire on the Hermannstrasse, the southern portion of Steinmetzstrasse and Rixdorf Plantation by intoxicated company commander **Walther Schwark**. The mission was doomed from the start due to the fact that the enemy maintained a clear field of fire. **Wallin** subsequently managed to convince the drunken **Schwark** to rescind the obviously futile order; instead they would remain where they stood with their half-track mounted mortars firing in place. **Wallin** adhered to the new arrangement until the droning sound of enemy aircraft was discerned just overhead. Suddenly, an unexpectedly lethal bomb detonation exterminated the entire platoon. **Wallin,** badly wounded with a perforated leg injury, was left barely able to walk. His war now over, he was evacuated to an administratively beset military hospital packed with wounded and dying soldiers.

'Nordland' Division was now in position between Görlitzer-Bahnhof and Neukölln. That night (27/28 April) the retreat continued. The Division absorbed some weak reinforcements by then, a naval battalion having been flown in.[359] *Rgt. 'Norge'* and *Rgt. 'Danmark'*, with a combined strength of approximately 600 soldiers, took up positions on the Anhalter Bahnhof – Cottbuser Platz – Gendarmenmarkt line just north of the Tempelhof Airport.[360] The *3./SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, still commanded by **SS-Haupsturmführer Pehrsson,** made their final attack along a rubble-strewn street in east Berlin. Here they managed to recapture four out of six half-tracks that had been cut off. The main area of company operations was Französischestrasse – Unter den Linden – Freidrichstrasse.[361] On the evening the same day, **Pehrsson** was transferred to the Reichstag with two half-tracks in order to serve as liaison officer between units spread out across embattled Berlin.[362]

Soviet forces managed to capture Spandau and achieved breakthroughs towards Schönberg and Kreuzberg; the savage city centre fighting grew ever closer.[363] As a result, the defence divided, the Wilhelmstrasse into 'West' and 'East' sectors, the latter being under *'Nordland's'* recently appointed commander **Dr. Krukenberg.** *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, supported by light guns from *8./ Rgt. 'Danmark',* by this time assigned to the defence of the Anhalter Bahnhof.[364]

The French *SS* volunteers, continuing their desperate struggle against masses of tanks, fought back an armoured assault on the Wilhelmstrasse, the nearby crater and debris-strewn Freidrichstrasse proving impossible for use by Soviet armour.[365] Intense fighting also continued at the Spittlemarkt on Freidrichstrasse and along the Wilhelmstrasse.

357 Tieke, pp. 307-08.
358 Ibid, p. 309.
359 Ibid, p. 311.
360 Ibid, p. 309.
361 Poller, p. 253.
362 Poller, p. 257.
363 Ibid, p. 253.
364 Tieke, p. 314.
365 Ibid, p. 316.

In order to save what could be saved **General Helmuth Weidling** put forth last-ditch plans for a breakout that same day. **Hitler** was however unwilling to listen. Their only salvation, the deluded *Führer* believed, was that generals **Steiner** and **Walther Wenck** would be able to break into Berlin with their armies. This was nothing but wishful thinking; both were hard-pressed and lacked the necessary equipment and fuel for a rescue operation. In fact, they could barely defend themselves, much less save the encircled Third Reich capitol. It was during the mid-day situation report that ***SS-Brigadeführer* Wilhelm Mohnke** – responsible for the defense of the Reichtag sector – informed **Hitler** that the enemy could be delayed for a maximum of 24 hours.

Hitler, recognizing there was only one way to save the city's beleaguered defenders, finally sanctioned a breakout attempt. The *Führer* committed suicide with his newly wedded wife barely two hours after the forlorn order reached **Weidling**.[366] **Pehrsson** related the momentous news to the Swedish Legation before it was made official. The main reason for his visit was however to obtain shelter for himself and the last – driver **Ragnar Johansson II** – of the volunteers. What happened exactly remains unknown to this day. **Olof Sandström** claimed they were turned away by none other than their former comrade in arms **Gunnar Eklöf**, while another member of the Legation erroneously claimed they were promised help and told to return later.[367] **Wallin** claimed that **Pehrsson** was attired in civilian clothing and actually faced a court-martial, but, luckily, he managed to return home in one piece.[368]

The situation around the Reichstag was desperate, with fighting raging close to the battle-damaged legislative pile until the Red flag was hoisted at 20.30 hours. **General Weidling** established contact with the Red Army during the early hours of 1 May to negotiate the capitulation of the city. The Soviet demand was clear: nothing but an unconditional surrender would be accepted. Meanwhile, savage battles still raged along the Friedrichstrasse and Potsdamer Platz.

Weidling gathered his subordinates to inform them about the decision to surrender. Set to begin on 2 May, those wishing to attempt to breakout was free to do so. Plans were hastily drawn up, and a message concerning the breakout was duly delivered to the staff of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* by **Pehrsson's** faithful orderly **Franz Bereznyak.** The word quickly spread amongst Berlin's defenders. There were two possible ways out: to the north, across the Weidendammerbrücke with the goal to reach **Steiners** Army or west-southwest to reach **Wenck's** *12. Armee.* The remnants of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* appear to have chosen the former route. Assembling at the Friedrichstrasse underground station, where more and more soldiers collected throughout the night. **Pehrsson** took leave of his soldiers by telling them "Boys! The war is over. Save yourself if you can!"[369]

The escape attempt commenced just after 00.00 hours on 2 May. Leading the breakout was a *Königstiger* from *s.SS-Pz-Abt 503* commanded by ***SS-Unterscharführer* Georg Diers.**[370] The tank-led party was met with intense fire that shot down soldier and civilian alike. Other portions of *'Nordland' Division* attempted to flee westwards over Spandau's Schulenburg Bridge. It is however uncertain if any members of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* accompanied them. At Weidendammerbrücke, the enemy crossfire caused a blood bath. Finally, at around 04.00 hours **Bereznyak's** crossed the bridge in a half-track to make his way to the Stettiner Bahnhof where he was eventually wounded

366 Poller, p. 266.

367 Report concerning chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA) and Report of events associated with Berlin's defensive battles, surrender and return journey to Sweden. 23.7.45. P4151. (RA)

368 Information provided by Erik Wallin to Lennart Westberg. Undated. (Author's archive)

369 Poller, p. 230.

370 Tieke, p. 330.

and captured.[371] Berlin capitulated one hour later. The Weidendammerbrücke breakout attempt had had failed. **Pehrsson's** half-track was knocked-out on the Friedrichstrasse:

> Pehrsson's tank [sic!] which also included Johansson, was hit by an enemy grenade, after which Pehrsson, Johansson, and one more crew member exited the tank to seek cover. A grenade, which wounded Pehrsson in the leg and felled two unidentified persons close to him, exploded close by. He could not say with certainty if one of these was Johansson, but he assumed it was so ... Pehrsson had not seen Johansson since they left the tank.[372]

The exact fate of **Ragnar Johansson II** remains unknown, some sources claiming he was killed outside the vehicle. However, **Pehrsson** only remarked that he fell, not that he died. Other sources claimed **Johansson** made his way to the Swedish Legation where he was refused entry on account of his uniform. His body was found nearby the following day.[373] A Swedish pastor in Berlin later commented :

> The message of Ragnar Johansson's fate saddened me. One of the few sympathetic Swedish volunteers I met in Berlin.[374]

Estonian-Swede **Arthur Brandt** was captured by the Soviet troops on 2 May. ***SS-Sturmbannführer*** **Rudolf Saalbach** gathered the last 33 soldiers from his unit at the burnt out Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof, and ordered them to form small groups before proceeding westwards. Joining two other officers, he disappeared, never to be seen again. That same day **Sten Eriksson,** who had served with *Rgt. 'Danmark',* exchanged his uniform at the Tiergarten for civilian clothing. Accompanied by a Norwegian comrade who did the same, they took refuge in a basement.

The Battle of Berlin as Witnessed by a Swedish Non-combatant

The battle of Berlin was nightmare for both the civilian and soldiers alike. The latter could at least put up some kind of futile resistance; civilians were left to their own fate. One Swedish national caught up in the fighting was ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Olof Sandström**, who had served as a liaison between the *SS* volunteers and the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin. One of his last official actions was an attempt to have volunteers released from contract. Having received no response from the training camps, he submitted enquiry letters with no further result. Still at the *SS-Hauptamt* in April 1945, he decided to try to make his way out but did not get far. Forced to turn back by circumstances, he chose to await the end of the fighting. ***SS-Unterscharführer*** **Erik Wallin** gave shocking testimony to the brutal fighting in *Twillight of the Gods*, **Sandström**'s equally shocking account provides the unvarnished testimony of a non-combatant:

> I ran straight into the fighting north of Berlin only to be captured by German patrols instead of Russian. I nevertheless managed, as the battles went back and forth and positions were captured and re-captured, to get free and made my way into Berlin through the woods under

371 Poller, p.230.

372 Report concerning chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

373 Bosse B. to the author, 2011.

374 Letter from Pastor Erik Myrgren. 21.11.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

A classic photo taken after the failed break out in Berlin on the night between 1 and 2 May 1945 showing a vehicle from 3rd Company *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* (Author's archive)

Ragnar Johansson II. (Bosse B. archive)

cover of darkness. A Russian patrol had taken my trench-coat, boots and bicycle. All I had left was a driving map, thermos and torch. I had been forced to tear my letters and papers into pieces. My passport and money were kept close to the body, so I managed to retain, to my great fortune, these items. I was mostly afraid some German would try to take my Swedish passport or that a Russian soldier, in the eagerness of combat, would tear it apart. I managed, however, to keep this important document and, attired in stocking feet, made my way back to Berlin.

A Russian took my sports coat while in a Berlin suburb; my backpack would probably also changed owners if it had not been for a German shell reversing the situation. I immediately helped bandage a heavily bleeding Russian hit by shrapnel, which probably contributed to allowing me to keep the remainder of my equipment. [Sandström had previously served as a medic in *'Wiking' Division*]

I spent, on reaching my previous Berlin housing, most of the time, as with the other civilians, in a basement throughout the day and night to avoid bombs and grenade shrapnel or being hit by the machine-gun fire in the later stages of the Berlin fighting.

My only use was crawling around outside my home to adjacent streets to help bandage the large amount of wounded civilians and soldiers who lay everywhere. I also participated in slaughtering the equally ubiquitous wounded horses on streets and in the yards, between terraced houses and sheds, bleeding and dying.

It was a horrible inferno of chaos. The detonations of exploding bombs, grenades and shells from low-flying Russian aircraft was the everyday Berlin scene. And in the ruins and on the shot up streets and in houses lay the wounded and dead helter-skelter; a simmering and boiling hell of death and destruction which never seemed to end. During the mornings, people made their way to riddled bread stores, stood in line to get a loaf that were mostly sold out on reaching the front of the line. Several of the waiting people had collapsed, hit by the shrapnel from shells and bombs.

The day before Berlin capitulated, the 2nd of May that is [sic], I tried to make my way to the Swedish church to see if any Swedes remained there, persons of authority I hoped. My first attempt failed and I had to turn back. The reason for this was that the fighting in the part of the town where the church was situated was especially hot and it seemed impossible to remain alive while making my way there.

That same morning I was awakened at 02.00 by a man leaning over me with a pistol pressed to my throat. Dazed I soon realized it was a Russian in search of German soldiers together with some of his friends.

The Russian placed me together with the other civilian and under threat of immediate execution they forced us to give up our watches, wedding rings and other rings of value. All men were searched for weapons and asked if they were soldiers. The women were taken upstairs and, as they later told us, raped. Other patrols arrived and searched our pockets and wallets for money which was ripped to pieces and thrown away. I managed to hide my money and passport, as I had experience from previous service with fighting soldiers.

When the day came, I collected my belongings in my back pack and left, with a white arm band in direction towards the Swedish church. My first intention had been to search for the Swedish Legation, but it turned out impossible as battles still raged in its immediate surroundings.

On the way to the Swedish church I witnessed, over and over again in the open streets, the rape of women of almost every age and the abuse of civilians who probably refused to give up their rings and watches,

When I reached the Swedish church it was in full blaze in the upper stories. I made my way to the bottom level and to the basement. Down there I heard Swedish being spoken and called

down to receive an answer from a Swedish family, man, wife and a daughter, named Schmidt, another Swedish family named Eklöf and a Swedish lady by the name Cahier.

Through the courtesy of a German doctor, who had already served with the Russians at a nearby hospital, it had been arranged that all Swedes on Swedish extraterritorial ground under protection of the church would be allowed to remain in a large hospital room.

The entire Swedish-designated area had been marked with Swedish flags along the fences and a large black notice board was placed at the entrance way bearing the following in Russian: 'This area is under protection of the Swedish Royal Legation. This is the Swedish church in Berlin. Unauthorized entrance is forbidden'.

The Swedes I met were trying to save the church belongings which were stored at the upper levels and in the basement. The previously mentioned Eklöf had also received a permit, stating in Russian that he was employed as church janitor and was responsible for the order there.

I was allowed to remain with the other Swedes, and we were brought together in the room at the hospital next to the church. It was the German doctor Huttmer, already very well-known by Swedish authorities and church officials that made this possible.

The church was, unfortunately, later plundered by the Russians, who took several treasures, cut open trunks and bags with knives, helped themselves to food supplies and stole valuable paintings that survived the fire. The church was burned to the ground after that. The conflagration raged for days, as coal and potato storage caught fire. What could be salvaged was carried down to the basement and saved. The above-mentioned Swedes had for several days taken shelter in the basement to avoid artillery fire.

I made my way to the Swedish bunker to report myself and leave a report about what was happenings at the church at the end of the fighting.

Following the capitulation, I lived with the other Swedes close to the church and participated in overseeing the transfer of its last belongings and the overseeing of the surrounding grounds.

Every day, it was often noted, Swedish flags were torn to shreds or stolen by persons unknown and the gate sign had been toppled over.

Several daily attempts were made to steal our food storage, and we constantly had to fight off the Russian soldiers, commissars and civilians of different nationalities who tried to enter our area in order to harass the women or to steal food and other belongings.

Every day we were ordered to clear the streets by soldiers and commissars, otherwise they threatened send us down into our basement to be blown to pieces or burned alive. ...

One day a terrified Swede by the name Ekman approached us carrying a water bucket and told us he had escaped from his house that morning while Russian soldiers shot the people living there. The Russians started from the top floor and made their way downwards to execute those residing in the basement. Ekman lived on the bottom floor and his flat was somewhat intact. E. had been informed that he would be brought down to the basement and in his despair had offered to fetch water for the soldier who kept guard at the entrance after which he made his escape.

One week passed. The situation became more and more unbearable. Russian soldiers, against our protests, forced their way into the restricted area to express interest in the women, use our provisional church kitchen as a toilet and dug anti-aircraft positions.

Finally, on 9 May 1945, the day the *Ostheer* finally capitulated, **Sandström** decided to leave Berlin together with other Swedes on foot. The trip to the demarcation line, normally just four hours duration, now took over two weeks. With the unexpected assistance of a Swede serving in the Canadian armed forces, they followed in the wake of a train headed for Bremen before reaching Hamburg. Inside **Sandström's** backpack was the Swedish flag that once flew from the

church flagpole. Riddled and torn by shrapnel and bullets, it was a sad reminder of the kind of wanton vandalism that saw the emptying of Soviet submachine-gun magazines into the crucifix on the chapel wall. The horrible things the wayward flag bearer had witnessed during the Third Reich's final days made him lose all faith in National Socialist ideology.[375]

CAPTIVITY, ESCAPE AND HOMECOMING

The pathetic remnants of *'Nordland' Division* met their inevitable fate, as the few surviving Swedes fell into Soviet captivity. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** and ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Olof Sandström** of the *SS-Hauptamt* remained safe in their extraterritorial sanctuary. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Per-Sigurd Baecklund,** who previously served in *SS-Feld-Ersatz-Btl. 11,* had been fortunate enough to escape the Battle of Berlin. His unit fled westwards and, on 2 May 1945, was disarmed and interred in Ludwigslust. His wife had by then rejoined him and the following day they escaped. The couple subsequently managed to reach Sweden on 19 May 1945.[376] **Erik Wallin** was captured at the hospital where he was recovering from the wound received whilst serving as platoon leader in 5th Company. Unaware he had been promoted to *SS-Oberscharführer* during the final days of the conflict, he would later disavow all claims of further promotion beyond *SS-Unterscharführer*. However, Soviet occupation of the hospital ensured the newly acquired rank was the least of his concerns. As a precaution, the bed-ridden **Wallin** removed all decorations and *SS*-insignia from his uniform. He also destroyed his Swedish passport which contained a photo of its owner in Finnish uniform. Soviet troops stormed the hospital the following day and searched for *SS* men by thrusting the snub-nosed barrels of their PPSh submachine guns into the chests of the wounded and asking *"Du SS-Man?".* **Wallin**, having succeeding in convincing his captors that he was a member of *Wehrmacht*, was left alone.[377] He would remain at hospital until Whitsunday.

Former company commander ***SS-Hauptsturmführer*** **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson,** who had been wounded during the breakout attempt on 2 May, escaped into a nearby building where he found shelter behind a hidden door. Remaining under cover for three days, he took a risk and ventured out. An encounter with a woman who promised to fetch civilian clothes ended with capture when she returned in the company of two Soviet soldiers. **Pehrsson** had just enough time to return to his former hiding place and change into army uniform before being made prisoner.[378] He was brought, following interrogation, to a hospital and later released for further care at the Swedish Consulate. There he was reunited with former subordinate **Gunnar Eklöf.**[379]

SS-Unterscharführer **Sten Eriksson**, the *Kriegsberichter* who joined *Rgt. 'Danmark'* during the Berlin fighting, had changed into civilian clothes with a Norweigan comrade on 2 May. Seeking shelter, they took refuge in a basement filled with civilians. The latter were, however, not comfortable with their presence, so they departed. Subsequently arrested by a Soviet patrol, the Norwegian companion presented a civilian ID-card and was released while **Eriksson** was brought to the *Reichtag* for interrogation. He claimed to be a civilian journalist and was eventually released. The

375 Report on events associated with Berlin's defensive battles, surrender and return journey to Sweden. 23.7.45. P4151. (RA)

376 Interrogation of Per-Sigurd Baecklund. 22.8.45. XII 83/ Ä3806. (RA)

377 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 188.

378 Ibid, p. 205.

379 Report concerning chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

hapless Swede managed to make his way to the western portion of Germany. He finally returned to Sweden in 1947.[380]

Three volunteers of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were, following capture, brought to collection camps prior to entraining for the east. **Erik Wallin's** acquaintance with a Swedish nurse while at hospital proved fortuitous when she passed on an envelope containing a passport provided by the Swedish Consulate and a large parcel containing civilian clothing and shoes. Having just managed to exchange his torn and tattered uniform for the more than welcome attire, a relieved **Wallin** was transported to a POW camp situated just east of Berlin.

***SS-Rottenführer* Ragnar Johansson (I),** serving in the supply section of *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* had been captured east of Berlin. His unit was surprised and overrun by a Soviet armoured unit sometime at the end of April. Having discarded his insignia and ID papers, including his Swedish passport, he was brought to a makeshift prison camp of 700-800 prisioners. Eschewing interrogation, his captors only required a statement that he was an ordinary *Wehrmacht* enlisted man. His treatment, J**ohansson** later observed, was good with plenty of food but the fear of being deported to Siberia was a major concern. Within a month he and 15 other Scandinavian volunteers escaped from the badly guarded camp and made their way to the British zone; the goal was to reach Hamburg, from where they could proceed home. An unfortunate traffic accident and subsequent medical treatment led to revelations of his *SS* identity. The luckless **Johansson** thus found himself a once again a prisoner of war. Released in early 1946, he returned home the spring of that same year.[381] **Erik Wallin** managed to escape from his camp by bluff; claiming to be a civilian, he made his way back to Berlin and reached the bunker of the Swedish Consulate where fellow countrymen greeted him and provided shelter in a bombed-out apartment building. A few days later, he ran into **Gunnar Eklöf,** with whom he had enlisted in 1943. He brought him to **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** and together the three expatriates discussed plans to return home. In early June 1945, they left the devastated city and eventually made their way to Western zone. **Eklöf** had taken an alternative route, but met up with the two comrades in north Germany.[382] **Wallin** and **Eklöf** continued on their way towards Brussels, from where they were flown home. **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** wanted to return to his family in Denmark. He was, however, betrayed by a neighbor to the Danish resistance shortly afterwards. Deported because of his Swedish citizenship, **Pehrsson's** family, including his disinherited spouse, followed him.

While **Eklöf, Wallin** and **Pehrsson** all managed to return home by the summer of 1945, others were not so lucky. **Ragnar Johansson (I)** did not return to Sweden until spring 1946, having spent the intervening period time as a POW. Estonian-Swede, **Artur Brandt**, who was captured in Berlin on 2 May and Swedish citizen ***SS-Unterscharführer* Franz Wahlberg**, captured just north of Berlin at the end of April, would experience a harsh existence in a Soviet camp, The latter was brought to a prisoner of war camp outside Küstrin from where he continued to several camps before being sent to a prisoner of war camp outside Leningrad. He remained there until repatriated in 1946. His weakened and emaciated condition was noted following his return.[383] The experience also influenced him to forgo politics in the future.[384]

Brandt was unlucky enough to be identified as an Estonian Swede. He was designated a traitor, his homeland still deemed part of the Soviet Union, and he died in captivity shortly after the war.

380 Poller, p. 289.

381 P.M. concerning the metal worker Nils Ragnar Johansson. 27.2.47. XII 83/Ä. 632. (RA).

382 Wallin, Hillblad, pp. 202 ff.

383 Compilation of case Hd. 3660/40. (RA)

384 Interrogation of Franz Rudolf Alfonso Wahlberg. 1.6.46. P4820. (RA)

Summary: *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* and the Swedish volunteers

SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 fought on the Eastern Front from January 1944 to May 1945. Fighting from the snow-covered woods outside of Oranienbaum to the shattered streets of Berlin it contained the most significant grouping of Swedish *SS* volunteers. While the actual number of Swedes within *'Wiking' Division* was greater, they remained unorganized and spread out across the entire division. Conversely, Swedes in *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* served together mostly in the same company under the command of a Swedish officer. The *'Wiking'* volunteers suffered eleven killed between 1941 and 1944, while the nine who served with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* were killed between Oranienbaum and Berlin.

The morale of the Swedish volunteers was, despite having served with their fellow countrymen, at an all-time low during this period. From Croatia, where the battalion first saw action during the fall of 1943 through the Courland Pocket in 1944, a total of twelve Swedes deserted and many more sought discharge. How many Estonian Swedes deserted remains unknown; according to one of their number it was the majority. A total of 18 served with the battalion, of whom 1 was killed, 1 was captured by Americans and 1 by the Soviets. The remainder might have made their way to Sweden, a nation many considered to be their fatherland.

There were, despite the unit's late entry into the war, few Swedes who had seen previous frontline service within the *Waffen-SS*. Several had served as volunteers in Finland, but had experienced static combat, patrols being the norm. Thus, most were new recruits – something which might explain why so many subsequently deserted. Two deserters were battle-hardened veterans of the *'Wiking' Division*, who admitted to having to motives of self-preservation and disinterest in further service. This author believes desertions were motivated by a belief that Germany would be defeated or a desire to return home. Also, it should be added that the actual possibility to make it from the battlefields in the Baltics to the neutral homeland probably only made the home-sickness worse. The reason why five volunteers chose to desert in Croatia remains much more difficult to fathom, as it would be almost impossible to return to Sweden from there.

Unlike *'Wiking' Division*, where the majority of volunteers served as NCOS or enlisted men, there had been a handful of volunteer commissioned officers within the Battalion. They held various service positions, the majority serving as platoon leaders. **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** is the most well-known company commander, but several others might have temporarily held the same position. Both **Heino Meyer** and **Rune Ahlgren** served as platoon leaders and deputy company commanders of 1st Platoon in 3rd and 2nd companies respectively. **Gunnar Eklöf** also claimed, during a post-war interrogation, that he briefly served as company commander during a period of calm in June 1944. Finally, it is worthy of note that in a post-war compilation of his service, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** claimed to have served for a brief period as temporary Battalion commander.

Five Swedes were awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Company commander **Pehrsson** was awarded the Iron Cross First Class and the Ehrenblattspange. **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** later claimed to have earned the Iron Cross First and Second Class, but whether or not this was with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11*, '*Hermann von Salza*' or *SS-Feld-Ersatz-Btl. 11* remains unknown. This may appear a relatively low figure since the unit was at the sharp end for most of its brief existence. There are two possible explanations for this: Swedes failed to earn decorations, or, as **Erik Wallin** later surmised, **Pehrsson**, concerned over accusations of favouritism, avoided recommending fellow countrymen for awards, etc. True or not, **Gunnar Eklöf** subsequently observed that complaints concerning perceived preferential treatment were legion.

7

Swedish War Correspondents

SWEDEN'S PROPAGANDA SOLDIERS

A number of Swedish volunteers wrote of their frontline experiences and forwarded the resultant accounts to journals such as *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*, which was the main *SSS* party organ. This gave the "homefront" some insight in what they experienced in the east. The newspaper published, in addition to *SS* volunteer stories, a steady stream of accounts originating from the Finnish front.

It is, when considering volunteer contributions, possible to discern a procedural divide: During 1941-43, the majority of articles were written by Swedes serving in *'Wiking' Division* as regular soldiers. From 1943 until the end of the war submissions were mainly written by Hans-Caspar Kreuger, who subsequently served with *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*. In addition, other Swedish nationals produced various propaganda material intended for Swedish and German audience consumption.

Introduction: *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*

The *Waffen SS* unit which eventually became *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* had its origin in an order from the *SS Führungshauptamt* dated January 1940 in which the decision to organize an *SS* Propaganda Company was confirmed. The *Waffen-SS* was at that time an extremely limited organization, and a single Company was deemed sufficient to cover propaganda needs. Three separate platoons subsequently dispatched from the the Company; one to *SS VT-Division*; one to *Totenkopf Division* and the last to *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH)*. The unit had its main headquarters in Berlin where submitted articles underwent censoring by the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*. Following *Waffen-SS* expansion the same year, additional platoons were formed for newly-raised divisions. This expansion led, in August 1941, to the unit being formed into a *Kriegsberichter-Abteilung* (Battalion). Additional equipment, including a radio station, was issued. In November 1943, the unit would be upgraded to independent regiment. *Standarte* and the name *Kurt Eggers* had its origins in the editor of *Das Schwarze Korps* – the *SS* official organ – who was killed while serving with *'Wiking' Division*. ***SS-Standartenführer*** **Günther d'Alquen**, a journalist**,** remained head of the unit until the end of the war.

Swedish Volunteers in *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*

The first serving Swedish *Waffen-SS* propaganda soldier was probably **Thorolf Hillblad** who began his service in 1941. Emigrating to Germany in 1939 he, according to personal testimony, was dispatched to Berlin following basic training at Sennheim because "some smart ass came up with the idea that I could do a better as *a Kriegsberichter*. There he was subsumed into *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* at the Lichterfelde barracks.[1] The idea was that he would participate in weapons

1 Letter from Thorolf Hillblad to Lennart Westberg, 1.12.86. (Author's archive)

training, which he himself found unnecessary and, after various disputes with **d'Alquen,** he was transferred to the Eastern front to report on the division's activities around Uman during the summer of 1941. This service was not without interruptions such as deliveries of press and film material to the headquarters in Berlin. Moreover, he was, at one stage, to be flown to Karelia to cover the fighting there. The plan fell through as the aircraft was needed elsewhere and **Hillblad** was for a short time stranded.[2]

Hillblad's service as a *Kriegsberichter* proved short-lived. During a trip to Berlin he met his German mother-in-law who was employed by **Alfred Rosenberg** at the *Ostminsterium* and was allowed to see several secret reports concerning the treatment of the civil population on the *Ostfront*. Consequently, a disillusioned Hillblad lost all interest in future service and requested discharge from the *SS*. He was, in exchange for his silence, granted release from service in late autumn 1941.[3] A civilian again, he went on to spend a short period as radio announcer at the 'Königsberg radio', an important propaganda centre that transmitted to Sweden. Later, recordings by other Swedish *Kriegsberichter* would be transmitted from there. He also established a Berlin office for the *SSS* members. Here he acted as director. From this point it appears **Hillblad** forwarded volunteer accounts to the *SSS* party organ and conducted interviews and compiled reports from various training camps and schools under the pseudonym 'Viking'. When **Hillblad** visited Sweden in late 1943, the office was managed by ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Bengt Hassler** a native of Stockholm. In a bugged telephone conversation, **Hillblad** enquired whether or not **Hassler** received anything of value for publication, which he had not.[4]

Hillblad was destined to be followed by another volunteer *Kriegsberichter*. On 21 November 1941 **Åke Lindquist (**b.1923) legally travelled to Norway. A former Winter War volunteer, he returned to Sweden and employment with the Stockholm based *K1* Cavalry Regiment.[5] The outbreak of the Continuation War in July 1941 inspired him to re-enlist as a volunteer for Finland. It was during this second tour of the Finnish front that he became familiar with National Socialism, several volunteer comrades having served as party organizers. Frontline service came to an end following a war injury in August. It was during the succeeding hospital stay that he became acquainted with an officer of Finnish/Swedish ancestry who encouraged him to apply for *SS*. **Lindquist** remained uncertain, but was advised to contact the officer if he encountered difficulties after his return home. Civilian employment proved difficult, so he decided to re-connect with the officer who subsequently convinced **Lindquist** to enlist in the *SS*. Having a passport already in hand, nothing prevented him from leaving Sweden.[6] Basic training at Sennheim and Klagenfurt was followed by posting to the Eastern Front. In interrogations, he later claimed he only served two weeks before travelling to Berlin to take up the duties of a official *Kriegsberichter*.[7] Returning to the Caucasus front for an additional five weeks documenting battles, he returned to Berlin and requested leave. *SS* documents reveal another story. He was, according to these, acting as an active combatant with *SS Kavallerie Regiment 3,* which later became part of the *8. SS Kavallerie Division 'Florian Geyer'*. It was during this service that he was promoted to ***SS-Sturmmann***. **Lindquist** was transferred to the *SS Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* in September 1942.[8]

2 Letter from Thorolf Hillblad to Lennart Westberg, 1.12.86. (Author's archive)
3 Ibid.
4 Conversation between Hassler (Berlin) and Hillblad (Stockholm) 14.12.43. Hd. 768/42. (RA)
5 *SS*-Stammkarte, Åke Lindquist. (Author's archive)
6 Interrogation with Åke Teodor Lindquist. 27.5.43. P3742. (RA)
7 Ibid.
8 *SS*-Stammkarte, Åke Lindquist. (Author's archive)

SS-Kriegsberichter Åke Lindquist. (Bosse B. archive)

***SS-Oberscharführer* Olof Sandström** was another volunteer who took up the mantel of war correspondent. Trained as a medic at training camps and a Berlin military hospital, he also participated in a NCO course. In March 1942 he transferred to the *SS Kriegsberichter Abteilung* in Berlin and was sent to the front within two months.[9] In addition to what he told the interrogators in Sweden following his return in 1945, not much is known about his service as a propaganda soldier. **Sandström**, in a conversation with a fellow countryman he encountered in Berlin in November 1943, related he had followed as a photographer in an aircraft above the Leningrad front.[10] He was sent also sent to the Ukrainian front to cover the fighting there. Subsequent service occurred for shorter periods each month. Returning to Berlin after the first tour, he submitted, his contract having expired, a discharge application. **Sandström** returned to the front before it was approved. Back in Berlin that October, his discharge was finally approved.[11] While no clear evidence of his works have surfaced, it is possible some of his stories were published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten.* An unknown volunteer who wrote to the magazine using the alias '**Olof Örn'** might have been none other than **Olof Sandström.** Following his service, a short period of leave was spent in in Sweden before returning to Germany. Upon returning, he took on the duties of liaison NCO at the *Germanische Leitstelle*, a sub-department of the *SS-Hauptamt*.[12] At the time of **Sandström**'s resignation, **Lindquist** was in Oslo on an extended period of leave. There he received a permit to visit Stockholm and on 17 October 1942 returned home. His *SS* service was over.[13]

9 Interrogation of Olof Sandström, 5.6.45. P4151. (RA)
10 Interrogation of Sten Börje Appelberg. 13.7.45. P4151. (RA)
11 Interrogation of Olof Sandström, 5.6.45. P4151. (RA)
12 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)
13 Interrogation of Åke Teodor Lindquist. 27.5.43. P3742. (RA)

Åke Regnell (b.1919) had, since his youth, been a convinced national socialist who by 1942 was employed at a small newspaper that sent him to Norway in order to write articles about the German occupation. On encountering (September 1942) returning volunteer **Fred Nilsson,** his interest in becoming an accredited war correspondent was aroused. Thus he travelled again to Norway with the intention of joining the *SS*. The routine medical examination found him unfit for frontline service due to a accident during his teenage years. Despite this, he was permitted passage to Berlin to train for the *SS Kriegsberichter-Abteilung*. Only allowed to attend theoretical courses, he was, at the conclusion of his training, offered employment as a German article translator. Declining this desk job, he returned home to fulfil his military service obligation and participate in the illegal attempt to establish the Stockholm *SS* recruiting office.

SWEDISH WAR CORRESPONDENTS: 1943-1945

Beginning with **Carl Svensson** the number of Swedish *Kriegsberichter* would increase from 1943 onwards. Born in Hamburg on 27 November 1915, he held a dual citizenship. Following in his Swedish father's seafaring footsteps, **Svensson** moved to Sweden in the early 1930s in order to join *Skeppsgossekåren,* the navy's youth organization.[14] By 1934 he was old enough to enlist in the navy and, at the outbreak of the war, was serving on board a cruiser as an NCO and anti-aircraft controller.[15] He had, by that time, kept close contact with **Freidrich Stengel**, an employee of the German consulate.[16] Following the invasion of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, his contacts with the legation, in addition to the fact that he had been quite active in the leading National Socialist Party, aroused suspicions of espionage.[17] Subsequently arrested, **Svensson** was released in absence of evidence. Resuming shipboard duty he, feeling that he had lost the respect of his fellow crewmates, resigned from the service.[18] Following this, he returned to Germany where, for a very short time, he worked on a fishing boat before joining the *SS* in fall 1941. *Kriegsmarine* enlistment was **Svensson's** first choice, but he was informed that they did not recruit foreign volunteers.[19] Because of his previous experience he was posted to an anti-aircraft training unit where he was allowed to participate as instructor after one week.[20] The obviously impressed commander asked **Svensson** if he would consider a commission. **Svensson**, having responded well this proposal, was despatched to Berlin in April 1942. Cadet instruction at the prestigious *Junkerschule* followed in May [21] During his stay in Berlin he had showed interest in becoming a war correspondent, why he was posted to the *Kriegsberichter-Abteilung* HQ in the Berlin suburb of Berlin-Zehlendorf after graduation in December 1942. How serious he was about becoming a *Kriegsberichter* remains open to question. In his subsequent (1943) marriage application he wrote that he wished to become a *SD* officer when possible.[22]

Considered fully trained, **Svensson** was posted to the Leningrad front. There he received his promotion to *SS-Untersturmführer* in March 1943 and assumed command of a propaganda company The Company, composed of radio reporters, cameramen and journalist operated

14 Interrogation of Carl Ferdinand Svensson. 5-12.5.45. P545. (RA) and P.M. concerning Swedish citizen Carl Ferdinand Svensson, born 27/11/ 1915. P545. (RA)
15 Case summary concerning Svensson spy suspicions. "Doc nr. 1131/40", Monday 29 April 1940. P545. (RA)
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Summary of case P. 545. (RA)
19 Letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg. 19.8.76. (Author's archive)
20 Interrogation of Carl Ferdinand Svensson. 5-12.5.45. P545. (RA)
21 Ibid.
22 R.u.S. Fragebogen. Svensson, Carl Ferdinand. (NARA)

SS-Untersturmführer Carl Svensson. (Author‘s archive)

independently. **Svensson**, having previously specialized in radio propaganda, shadowed a Tiger tank crew for several days, something which he considered to have been his best reportage.[23] At this stage of the war, the material he produced was published in both German and Swedish. During **Svensson's** occasional trips to Berlin he often took the opportunity to prepare the previously forwarded material himself.[24]

One who meet **Svensson** during this period was the Flemish volunteer and *Kriegsberichter* **Oswald Van Ooteghem.** Serving on the same front as the former, it was during the battle of Krasny Bor in March 1943 that he was severely wounded and his close comrade **Harry de Booy** was killed. **Van Ooteghem,** lying beside his dead friend, believed that his last moment had arrived when a *Radioberichter* truck suddenly drove up. In it was **Svensson**, who picked up the wounded Flemish volunteer and drove him to the nearest field hospital. **Van Ooteghem** passed out and did not learn the identity of his saviour until 2011 when he was contacted by the author.

The Company left Russia to head southwards to Greece at the close of 1943. Instead of documenting combat and fighting units, they chronicled the civilian population and their daily lives, but **Svensson** also made a pint to cover the *Luftwaffe*'s experience over the Mediterranean from inside an aircraft.[25]

Another Swedish professional soldier with the unit was **Gösta Borg** who had previously served in both the Finnish Winter War and with the *'Wiking' Division* in 1941. That same year, however, he resigned from the *SS* and returned to Sweden to resume military career. His dream was to obtain a commission in Sweden. **Borg's** roots were working class and he became an ardent National Socialist in his early teens. Indeed, he was so fanatical that when the *NSAP* changed its name and simultaneously exchanged the swastika for the Sheaf of Vasa in1938, he tendered his resignation.[26]

23 Letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg. 11.1.85. (Author's archive)
24 Interrogation of Carl Ferdinand Svensson. 5-12.5.45. P545. (RA)
25 Letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg. 19.8.76. (Author's archive)
26 Hd. 3268/40. P2557. (RA)

Torkel Tillman during the war correspondent training which he underwent with Gösta Borg following Bad Tölz. He wears the Hitlerjugend membership badge on his pocket, which he received while being a member of the organization during his time as a foster child in Germany. (NARA)

Having resumed his military career, he participated in an officer candidate course from which he graduated second. Thus he was guaranteed study at the elite officers' school at Karlberg. This appointment received much attention from the left wing press, which wrote of the scandal that an ex-*SS* soldier had the opportunity to become an officer.[27] **Borg**, following a great deal of discussion, was given an ultimatum: sign a document stating that he had no Germany or National Socialist sympathies or resign.[28] He chose the latter and his employment with the Swedish army came to an end in July 1943.[29] By then, **Borg** was producing articles for various National Socialist media. His dissatisfaction with the spirit of readiness and morale of Swedish recruits was described in a newspaper article in the nationalist newspaper *Dagsposten* the following August.

Another article, written by **Borg** in September, praised the *Waffen-SS* under the title '*Waffen-SS – A Germanic Front Soldier Fellowship'*. **Borg** still hoped that he would be accepted for commission in Sweden, but the subsequent realization that this would never happen led to his decision to re-enlist in the *Waffen-SS* or seek service on the Finnish front. Disorganisation at the latter's recruiting office resulted in him deciding to rejoin the *SS*. Crossing the frontier with Norway with another *'Wiking'* veteran in September, he made his way to Oslo.[30] Presenting themselves to the relevant authorities, it was decided to enrol the wayward Swedes at the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz*, where they commenced training with *3. Lehrgang für Germanisches offiziere* – an indoctrination course for foreign-born officers which begun in October 1943. Simultaneously the *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang* started, where **Torkel Tillman**, a Swede-German who enlisted for the *SS* in 1942 were to be trained to become an officer.[31] **Tillman** was born in Sweden to a German mother and a Swedish father in 1917. Raised in Germany by a foster family following his parents' divorce,

27 Arbetartidningen 20.6.43 and Trots Allt 23.6-1.7.43. (KB)
28 Gösta Borg service record (KrA).
29 Lebenslauf, Gösta Borg. 1943. (NARA/BDC)
30 Forplikteleserklaering/Verpflichtungserklärung 2.10.43. Gösta Borg. (NARA/BDC)
31 11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang student list. (NARA/BDC)

he had been a member of the *Hitlerjugend*. Returned to Sweden in 1934 to begin his military service,[32] he rose to become an NCO despite suspicions, based on the fact that his mother was employed at the German consulate, of espionage.[33] As with **Svensson**, no evidence was discovered to support the accusations. In April 1942 he acquired German citizenship. Two months later he joined the *SS* after which he served as an instructor with the rank of *SS-Unterscharführer* at the Sennheim basic training camp.[34]

Swedish nationals were also employed as civilian workers at Königsberg radio where they worked on translation and transmission of propaganda broadcasts directed at their native land. Amongst them was National Socialist devotee **Yngve Nordborg**. Born in 1897, he was destined to be one of the oldest *SS* volunteers. His interest in pursuing a military career came at an early age. He was, following completion of military service, accepted for officer training. Subsequent illness forced him to abandon his dream whereupon he moved to Gothenburg to pursue university studies instead. His other great interest besides military affairs was music and during this time he performed at various concerts and theatres.[35] In 1922 he moved to Vienna to study music. There he met an Austrian singer whom he married a year later. Returning to Sweden four years later, **Norberg** established his own music school and became politically active. He joined the National Socialist Party under **Birger Furugård.** The subsequent split in the party was followed by membership in the *NSAP*. A feeling of dissatisfaction, however, grew within him as he considered the party to not taken sufficient actions against "Jews and communists". Resigning his membership, he instead joined the *Malmö National Youth Alliance*.[36] During the 1930's he also joined the home guard, where, by 1935, he attained the rank of lieutenant. He also obtained employment with a travel agency that organized group trips to the Reich.[37]

The outbreak of war in 1939 made it impossible for **Norberg** to continue sojourns to Germany; a return to the music industry was equally impossible. Home guard service offered a way to make ends meet until he was sent home in 1941. It was during the fall of that year when followed an acquaintance to Germany and subsequently offered employment at the Königsberg radio. Still a serving Swedish officer, he had to return and seek permission from the Swedish military authorities. Once home, however, he was informed of his discharge for inappropriate political activities. The blow was softened by the fact that he no longer needed official sanction to work in Germany. Back in Berlin in October 1942, he started working as a radio translator.

Employment as a translator was followed by that of announcer under the command of ***Ländergruppenleiter*** **Eichberg.** It was during this period that the tone against Sweden was rather brusque and the material was mostly direct translations of German articles. This changed during the summer of 1943 when the station was assigned a new commander who granted the Swedes more independence and greater input with broadcast contents.[38]

Carl Svensson's *Kriegsberichter* service may have made him the longest serving within in the unit, but he was far from the most prolific contributor. **Hans-Caspar Krueger,** who joined the *Waffen-SS* in 1942, wrote several articles (published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* from 1943) during his service with *'Wiking' Division*. The articles were well-written and concerned not only

32 R.u.S.Fragebogen for *SS-Frw*. Tillman, Thorkell. (NARA/BDC)
33 Classified: Signal Regiment, Regimental expedition. 4.12.39. (MUST)
34 Information from Erik Harald Jonsson, for further details see Chapter 5.
35 *SS*-Stammkarte (NARA) and PROMEMORIA: 17 August 1945. From the Police, Malmö to the Police, Stockholm. P2768. (RA)
36 PROMEMORIA: 17 August 1945. From the Police, Malmö to the Police, Stockholm. P2768. (RA)
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.

with the soldier's everyday life, but also offered insightful glimpses into the lives of the Soviet population behind the front. It was probably around the end of 1943 that he was transferred to the *SS Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* where his talents were put to better use. He remained with *'Wiking'* for a few more months.[39] His last action with the division was more than likely during the break out of the Cherkassy Pocket in February 1944. It had, according to a German officer, been planned to fly him out in one of the last planes, but **Krueger**, wanting to share the fate of his comrades, refused and instead participated in the breakout on the night of 16/17 February.

Svensson received orders to report to the unit's Berlin headquarters in March 1944. Here he received a permit that allowed him to travel freely among the frontline units stationed in the vicinity of the posting. In addition, he received orders that from now on, he would primarily produce propaganda material in his native language. Sent to the Narwa front in Estonia where fighting had raged since the start of the year,[40] he was joined by **Krueger** who would participate in a *SS_Kriegsberichter* training course later that spring, whereupon he became an *SS* officer candidate.

Borg and **Tillmann** graduated from *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* on 11 March. By this time, however, it remained undecided whether or not they would become *SS-Kriegsberichter*; in fact they were posted to a *Panzergrenadier* and signals school respectively for further training. In the end, following a few weeks training, they were assigned to *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* at Berlin-Zehlendorf. This did not please **Borg** initially as he still wanted to become a frontline officer. The assignment within the propaganda unit, however, proved congenial in the long run and he grasped the opportunity to improve his German language skills.[41] Transported to Estonia during the spring in order to work with **Svensson** and **Krueger**, **Borg** held the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer*, while **Tillmann** was an officer candidate.

By then, another Swedish volunteer had joined the *SS*. **Folke Renhammar**, whose brother had been convicted of treason in Sweden, was born in Gothenburg in 1909 and joined the *SS* in Norway on 17 March 1944.

Four Swedish *Kriegsberichter* served at the Narwa front in spring 1944. The fighting there became something of a symbol to the European *SS*, as volunteers from Estonia, Flanders, Norway, Denmark, Holland and Sweden participated in the struggle against great odds. In addition to paying visits to Swedish volunteers of *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11,* the correspondents snapped photos, wrote articles and recorded radio reports. **Krueger** interviewed the Dutch Knight's Cross recipient **Geradus Mooyman** who was the first of the European volunteers to receive the decoration. A photo of him interviewing **Mooyman** was published on the front page of the magazine *SS Kleiner Berichter Kurier*. He also wrote obituaries for fallen Swedes. **Borg** and **Svensson** recorded radio reports which were later aired under the title 'struggling Europe'. One of **Borg's** superiors described him "as a literate and capable officer who puts great interest into radio work towards his home country".[42] It was not only superiors who were satisfied – in a bugged telephone conversation, the former *SS* volunteer **Bengt Rosmark** said "[H]e [**Borg**] makes objective speeches, very strong messages!"[43]

39 This conclusion is based on a Christmas greeting published in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* during the winter of 1943. Earlier articles were signed by '*SS-Schütze* H-C. K.' while the greeting was signed *'SS-Kriegsberichter* H-C. K.'

40 Interrogation of Carl Ferdinand Svensson. 5-12.5.45. P545. (RA)

41 Interrogation of Sam Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)

42 Beurteilung, Berlin 25.5.44. Signerad Buchholz, *SS-Obersturmführer* vid Gruppe Rundfunk / Fremdsprachen. (NARA/BDC)

43 Abstract from P.2204 ang. Rosmark to P.2557 Borg. P2257. (RA)

Hans-Caspar Kreuger and his driver in Narwa, early 1944. (Author's archive)

Carl Svensson (left) while interviewing Geradus Mooyman, the first *SS* volunteer to be awarded the Knight's Cross. In the background is Narwa Castle. (Göran Hargestam)

The Swedish *Kriegsberichter* worked in close cooperation while at Narwa. Depicted are Carl Svensson and Gösta Borg conducting a recording that was subsequently broadcast. (Göran Hargestam)

The overall situation of the Swedish *Kriegsberichter* had changed by June 1944. It was decided, now that a new front had opened in Western Europe, that **Tillman** and **Svensson** would be transferred there instead. **Krueger** and **Borg**, remaining in Estonia, would be joined by another Swede. **Sten Eriksson** had been posted to the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* during the spring of 1944. Having previously served in the *'Wiking' Division* for a short spell, he contracted frostbite in February 1943. Several attempts were made by **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** and **Gösta Borg** to recruit him for *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*. This finally succeeded after further persuasion from the *'Nordland' Division* commander. Placed under the aegis of **Krueger** who he knew from the period of training at Sennheim in 1942. But, according to **Eriksson**, his superior was a worthless leader who never provided instruction about the subjects he would write about. **Eriksson** never saw any of his articles published, but campaign researcher **Petter K.** managed to unearth an article printed in an Estonian newspaper. The topic was the withdrawal from Narwa to the Tannenberg line.

Krueger and **Tillman** received their promotions to *SS-Untersturmführer* on the 20 June 1944. The former had not participated in any officers training, but was nevertheless granted the honorary rank of *Tapferkeitsoffizier* or bravery officer. This gallantry was not military in character, but rather in recognition for his propaganda work.

Eriksson was not the only soldier from the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* they tried to recruit. An offer was also given to **Erik Wallin** by **Krueger**. Company commander **Pehrsson** responded sarcastically by asking **Wallin** "what are you going to do in that cock-sucker Company?".[44] The unit's reputation had been stained since it emerged that **Krueger** was bisexual, **Pehrsson** suggested suicide or courts martial, and handed him a loaded pistol. **Krueger,** refusing to comply, decided

44 Poller, p.92.

to face an official investigation. It subsequently came to light that **Krueger**, in light of numerous recorded incidents, had molested other soldiers who bore witness against him. Such incidents took place after bouts of heavy drinking during so-called "comrade evenings" at the end of May 1944. In another incident, according to an officer's testimony, he had not seen evidence of "homosexual behaviour", but, like other Scandinavians, **Krueger** drank too much. **Krueger**, however, would be removed from active service. The investigation was still active as of February 1945.[45] From summer of 1944, the author has been unable to discover related articles from the fairly regular *Kriegsberichter*. This is probably due to the fact that **Krueger** was dismissed from active service. He was also hospitalized in Vienna after falling ill.[46] **Borg** left the Narwa front for Finland in order to document the greatest struggle on Nordic soil – the Battle of Ihantala, which commenced on 25 June 1944.[47]

Now on the western front, **Svensson** received documentation and a car directly from **Field Marshal Walther Model**. This ensured the vehicle would not be confiscated by other units.[48] Together with **Torkel Tillman** he documented the combat experiences of the *12. SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend'* as part of a component war correspondent platoon. Tillman's death at Cheux St Manvieu on 26 June 1944 would make him the sole Swedish *Kriegsberichter* to fall in action.[49] Subsequently buried at the nearby German war cemetery, he rests there to this day. Conversely, **Svensson** was evacuated Normandy due to sickness. It is highly likely that he convinced **Nordborg** to join the *SS* during this period.[50] Indeed, **Nordborg**, having grown bored with radio work, visited the *Ersatzkommando Königsberg* where he signed a service contract that August. Found fit for duty following the prerequisite medical exam, he travelled to Berlin and from there was dispatched to a training camp near Graz.

Borg returned to Estonia in the middle of July 1944 where he visited the badly damaged monument dedicated to Karl XII's victory over the Russians in 1700. Promised salvage assistance by the commander of the *'Nordland' Division*, he returned several days later to find everything worth saving was gone without a trace and his helpful benefactor **von Scholz** was around the same time killed in action.[51] **Eriksson** remained active on the Narwa front and was one of the last soldiers to leave the stricken city. Following the occupation of the three vital hills that formed the *Tannenberg-Line*, **Eriksson** visited the Estonian volunteers stationed in the low-lyimg swampland below. He also documented the battles at the most eastern – 'Orphanage Hill' – of the eminences where he was wounded in action.[52]

Borg departed for Poland that August to document the battle at Radzymin where *IV. SS Panzer-Korps* (consisting of *Totenkopf* and *'Wiking' Divisions*) halted the Soviet offensive towards Warsaw. From there he covered the extremely bloody Warsaw uprising, where he photographed the head of the Polish insurgents (**General Bor)** during capitulation negotiations in early October. Although not a front line soldier per sé, it was still a dangerous task. In his post-war book, *The Red Mass Assault* – a handbook about how a Soviet invasion of Sweden would be repelled – **Borg** wrote of his experiences during the uprising:

45 Information from Publication T-354 rolls 172 – 184 (NARA) provided by John T. Moore.
46 As related by Erik Wallin to Erik Rundkvist. (Date unknown).
47 Interrogation of Sam Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)
48 Interrogation of Carl Ferdinand Svensson. 5-12.5.45. P545. (RA)
49 *SS-Führungshauptamt* documents, II W I Abt.3. 12/1 1945. (NARA/BDC)
50 PROMEMORIA: 17 August 1945. From the Police, Malmö to the Police, Stockholm. P2768 (RA)
51 *Karolinska Förbundets Årsbok* 1991, sid 13.
52 Letter from Sten Eriksson, 7.3.86. (Author's archive)

Gösta Borg. (Author's archive)

> The struggle for the theatre street and theatre site was the hardest during this amazing time. Every avenue was blocked with successive metre-high barricades. Each barricade was defended with indescribable extremism. The attackers sent out amounts of small remote controlled tanks with hundreds of kilos of explosives. These were sent to the barricades and tore horrible gaps – but behind were men, women and children who constantly built new embankments. Metre by metre struggled the assault teams towards the theatre district from which a number of streets could be contained. Salvos of rocket grenades and artillery fire, roaring dive-bombers, direct firing guns and tanks. Gasoline was pumped into houses; they fought from room to room, blew each other into pieces from below, from the sides and from above. They shot each other in the face and died in furious embrace. Fire was sprayed into cellars packed [with people] and we waded in the sewage sludge to overtake our opponents. The dead littering the streets could not be salvaged – they were eaten by the flies or shot to pieces by automatic weapons. Everything was blown, scattered, thrown about – wads of cash, lingerie, jewelry, food and the remains of people."[53]

The battle was costly to soldier and civilian alike:

> [A] floor hatch! – up with it – down! What met me down there was just indescribable: The basement was packed with civilians, dead, dying, crying, wheezing – and the air, thick from the stench of perhaps 200 people in agony, the stench of bodies and excrement. In such a basement a bomb might explode – fire might be sprayed in – or gasoline might be pumped within.

53 Borg. p. 169.

Nordborg completed his training and was promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer* – an officer's rank equal to his former Swedish rank – in September. Posted to Holland, where **Svensson** also served,[54] they both experienced 'Operation Market Garden'. **Nordborg** withdrew from his role as a war reporter in order to fight as a regular soldier. Shooting Allied paratroopers as they helplessly hung in their parachutes was something he subsequently described as one of the worst experiences. **Svensson,** still on the Western Ffront at year's end, was promoted to *Obersturmführer* in November.[55]

Borg served on the Eastern Front until December 1944. Departing for Belgium that month, he covered the Battle of the Bulge which began on the 16th.[56] The last gasp German offensive, despite initial success, failed and in January he was removed from the front on suspicion of espionage.[57]

In regard to the remaining Swedish officers in *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'*, the majority experienced a change of service at the beginning of 1945. **Svensson**, having participated in battles around Alsace and along the Rhine, became concerned about the conflict's outcome. These views were shared with other *Kriegsberichter* who readily conceded the war was lost.[58] Thus he decided to seek discharge. **Nordborg's** service terminated in January 1945 when he was transferred to *SS Hauptamt*, before final posting to a tank hunting unit in south Germany.[59] **Sten Eriksson** followed the *'Nordland' Division* into the Courland Pocket in fall 1944 and visited *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* from where he had been transferred a few months earlier. During his stay he conducted an interview with the Knight's Cross winner ***SS-Unterscharführer* Kaspar Sporck** who served in 5th Company. The article was published in a Norwegian newspaper at the end of the year.[60] He also paid a visit to his former company and its Swedish commander **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** and participated in a failed night attack.[61] Leaving behind the battered remains of the division he was instead transferred to Berlin where he clashed with the liaison officer **Gunnar Eklöf** for a second time. Feeling the need to leave Berlin as soon as possible, he requested transfer back to his old division *'Wiking'* which was by then fighting in Hungary. His superior officer, discerning the real reason for the request, refused to help him. In fact, **Eklöf** attempted to discredit **Eriksso**n in writing**.** This enraged the superior, who wrote in response that the latter had been an exemplary soldier.[62] No evidence came to light in support of the accusations of espionage against **Borg** and he was permitted to return to active service. He was, given the absence of assignments, posted to Norway at the end of March 1945. It was there that Königsberg radio had been relocated in order to prepare broadcasts from a newly-erected mobile station. Broadcasts resumed on the 15 April 1945; the end of the war was only a few weeks away.[63]

Nordborg's ad hoc unit had dissolved, following an internal war council, in a Bavarian forest two days earlier. Donning civilian clothes, he roamed the countryside until the capitulation. Making contact with an American unit in May, he claimed to be a Swedish opera singer wishing

54 Letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg. 11.1.85. (Author's archive)
55 Stammkarte, Carl Svensson. (NARA)
56 Interrogation with Sam Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)
57 Ibid. His time in Hamburg is also mentioned in his Lebenslauf, 1945. (NARA/BDC)
58 Letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg. 1.9.76. (Author's archive)
59 PROMEMORIA: 17 August 1945. From the Police, Malmö to the Police, Stockholm. P2768. (RA)
60 Aftenposten 29.12.44. (Natedal Archive)
61 Letter from Sten Eriksson. 7.3.86. (Author's archive)
62 Letter from Sten Eriksson. 3.7.86. (Author's archive)
63 Interrogation of Sam Gösta Borg. 14.5.45. P2557. (RA)

SS-Obersturmführer Yngve Nordborg. (Martin Månsson)

to return home. Accepting this dubious tale, he was provided with the proper documentation. This allowed him to return via Denmark in August 1945.[64]

Eriksson returned to the Eastern Front in March 1945. There he attached himself to *'Nordland' Division* during the fighting in Pomerania. Posted as a *Kriegsberichter* with *II./Regiment 'Danmark*, he participated in the fighting withdrawal to Altdamm. There the exhausted volunteers fell into a deep sleep. **Eriksson** woke up to discover himself alone. Isolated and lost, he managed to locate a bridge spanning the Oder over which he made his escape. The bridge was blown to pieces shortly afterwards.[65] Back with the *II./Regiment 'Danmark',* he joined Battalion commander **Per Sörenssen** and headed into Berlin. The remnants of the *Kriegsberichter* platoon, (under command of **Hans-Caspar Krueger**)[66] were**,** according to **Eriksson,** makingtheir way westward in order to avoid soviet captivity. **Krueger** probably turned south to Vienna where he had an apartment to wait out the final weeks of the war.[67]

Renhammar was despatched to northern Italy on courier duty in March 1945. His war ended when he was captured there. Swedish platoon commander **Heino Meyer** wrote to the Swedish foreign ministry with an offer to assist the numerous enquiries of missing volunteer relatives. One

64 Police report Friday 26 October 1945, Malmö, criminal department. (RA)

65 Letter from Sten Eriksson, 7.3.86. (Author's archive)

66 Krueger appears to have been cleared of the accusations against him and allowed to return to service.

67 Information provided by Swedish *SS*-veterans. The complete investigation concerning the case was recently discovered in US archives. (Author's archive).

Hans-Caspar Kreuger. (Martin Månsson)

of them was **Renhammar** and while **Meyer** received no assistance from the Swedish authorities, he was still in an Allied camp at Naples in September 1945.[68]

Eriksson witnessed the French volunteers from the *Charlemagne Division* marching singing as they entered bomb-shattered Berlin during the last week of the war. Recognising that his journalist's role was both ridiculous and unnecessary, he joined in the fighting as a designated runner. The fighting all but over and the outcome a certainty, he changed into civilian clothes prior to capture. Masquerading as a Swedish civilian, **Eriksson** was brought to the Reichstag for questioning. His Soviet interrogators believed his story and released him. Taking on work for a British company, two more years would pass before he returned Sweden.

In the meantime, **Svensson** had been released from his contract by **d'Alquen.** Ordered to travel to Denmark in order to resolve the specifics of his departure home, he was, after much negotiation, permitted to resign. Offered assistance in regard to currency exchange, he deposited accumulated funds at nearby military installation with the understanding that the money would be reclaimed the following day. This was, unfortunately, 5 May. The German occupying forces having surrendered during the night of 4/5 May, the cash was lost. **Svensson**, his funds lost, destroyed his identity papers and pistol before boarding a flight that transported him from Copenhagen to Malmö in Sweden.

Borg spent the last days of the war in Norway with the woman who would shortly thereafter become his wife. As it was unwise to walk about in his *SS* uniform, he had posted it back to

68 Letter from Heino Meyer to the Swedish Foreign Ministry, 13.6.45. (Author's archive).

Sweden and wore civilian clothes instead.[69] The radio station staff recognised that the end of the war was drawing near. On 6 May he was married**.** The following day he visited *SS* headquarters and was discharged. Told to return 30 minutes later to complete all the formalities, he found the building abandoned after his return. His resignation for all practical purposes now confirmed **Borg** obtained passports for himself and his wife after which they boarded a train for home on 8 May.[70]

Aftermath and Postscript

A number of former *Kriegsberichter* were questioned by the police during the post-war years. Unfortunately, the author has been unable to place their claims in any sort of chronological order. The statements are, nevertheless, still worth considering. Indeed, it is mentioned in the exceptional *Führerliste der Waffen-SS* by **John P. Moore** that volunteer **Svensson** served within the *4. SS-Polizei-Division* as a *Kriegsberichter*.

Borg informed his interrogators about some prominent members of the Third Reich encountered during active service. The names included that of legendary *SS* General **Sepp Dietrich**. The author believes that this more than likely occurred during the Battle of the Bulge. Some of the information suggested that **Nordborg** was awarded the *Iron Cross* first and second class for knocking-out two American tanks with the hand-held *Panzerfaust*. It is possible that this occurred during his time with the tank hunting unit, but may have have happened during the fighting in Holland. Less likely was the account of a Swedish journalist who claimed that **Nordborg** had been a witness to **Adolf Hitler's** wedding and the cremation the day after. The veracity of this preposterous tale is, needless to say, unworthy of serious consideration.

69 His complete uniform is in the hands of a private collector.

70 Summary of case P.2557. Thursday 10 June 1948. P2257. (RA).

8

Swedish Mountain Troops

The *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division 'Nord'* and the Norwegian sub-units

Thousands of Swedes served in Finland during the Second World War. Finland was considered to be a brother nation, and under the slogan "Finland's cause is ours!" Swedes legally joined their struggle against the Soviet Union, both during the Winter War in 1939-40 and during the so-called 'Continuation War' from 1941 to 1944. Swedish nationals fought both in the regular Finnish army, but also more commonly in Swedish volunteer units, such as the *Swedish Volunteer Corps* during the Winter War and in the *Swedish Volunteer Battalion* during the continuation war. Some *SS* volunteers actually felt that they had been lured into German service, as they had intended to fight for Finland but instead ended up being deployed in the Ukraine. However, a small group of Swedish volunteers would actually see action in Finland within the ranks of the *SS*, serving with the *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division 'Nord'*, a mountain trooper Division. The Division was not a 'volunteer' unit, but did contain several Norwegian sub-units, such as the *Schijäger-Kompanie, Schijäger-Btl. 'Norge'* and two Norwegian "police-companies". The unit designation *schijäger* literally translates into "ski rangers", which can be described as light infantry that travel by skis to participate in patrol activities behind enemy lines.

It made sense to place the Swedish volunteers within the *'Wiking'* and *'Nordland' Divisions*. Both formations were supposed to be "volunteer" formations, and indeed a large number of Scandinavian volunteers served in their ranks. The fact that Swedes also served with *'Nord' i*s quite strange given that most of them served with the division at the same time as it was planned to concentrate Swedes within the *'Nordland' Division*.

There was never any organized thought behind Swedish nationals in the *'Nord' Division*, but as they served in a (relatively speaking) quite large number, they deserve their own chapter.

* * *

Even if the unit had been in existence since February 1941, by then organized as *SS-Kampfgruppe 'Nord'* from S*S-Totenkopf-Infanterie-Regiment 6, 7* and *9* (originally tasked with guarding the northern border of Norway), it would not be until the latter stages of the war that Swedes came to serve within its ranks. As *Operation Barbarossa* commenced in the summer of 1941, the *Kampfgruppe* was moved to Finland and participated in the battle of Salla. As mentioned in the chapter about *Swedish volunteers in various combat formations* it is quite possible that one Swedish volunteer, Olaf Jürgenssen, served with the newly-created *Kampfgruppe,* although little is known about his service.

SS-Kampfgruppe *'Nord'* suffered heavy casualties during the summer of 1941; its overall combat performance was poor. German personal had been unprepared for the harsh conditions in Finland and lacked the necessary training. During the fall of 1941, the formation was rebuilt and trained by experienced Finnish officers and NCOs. Following this, the unit was redesignated '*SS-Division-Nord'* in September 1941. During 1942 it returned to the front and aquitted itself well agains the Soviet spring offensive. Re-designated *SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division 'Nord'* that year by adding

Frank Gustavsson (in the middle shaking hand) was a Swedish citizen born in Norway. He received the rare "Germanische Leistungsrunen" Sports badge, and amongst his other decorations are the Infantry Assault Badge and the Norwegian Front Fighter badge. (Geir Brenden)

newly-formed sub-units from Germany.From 1942 through 1943 the division served on the Kestenga front with superior performance when compared with earlier battles.

Swedes would have served in these units not only as front line soldiers, but also as military instructors. **Frank Gustavsson** was a Swedish citizen born (1923) in Norway who had served with the *'Wiking' Division* in the Ukraine during 1941. He was discharged as a result of sickness, but only if he promised to return to service if required. Thus, he was once more called up for service in the fall of 1942 when the first Norwegian unit, which would be subsumed to the *'Nord' Division*, was a created *Schi-Kompanie Norwegen* which would see action in Finland until the summer of 1943 when it returned to Norway. **Gustavsson** was promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer* and initially served there as instructor, before being sent to Klagenfurt instead.[1]

In early 1943, **Karl-Martin Ågrahn** and **Walther Nilsson** deserted from their Regiment in Sweden by crossing the Finnish border with hopes of enlisting in the *SS*. Following enlistment it was most probably initially planned that they would serve with the *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division Nord*. However, due to counter-orders originating from Berlin, it was instead decided that they would serve in the *11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Nordland'*. Months later, in November, two more Swedish nationals, **Harry Gauffin** and **Bertil Nässil,** crossed the Norwegian border with the intention of joining the *SS*.[2] **Gauffin** (b.1913), had previously seen combat in Finland, both during the Winter War and the Continuation War of 1941, when

1 Report, Wednesday 11th of July 1945 concerning Bergstrand, Tord Osar Turesson och Gustavsson, Frank Asbjörn. (MUST)

2 Document concerning Nässil, Per Bertil. F. 20/1 24. Stockholm, 14/3 1945. (MUST)

The young Bertil Nässil. (Author's archive)

Harry Gauffin attired in Swedish army uniform. (Author's archive)

he served on the Hanko Front. He was a convinced National Socialist and a member of the *SSS* party and its front line organisation *Sveaborg*.[3] His younger friend **Nässil** (b.1924) was also a National Socialist, who joined the *SSS* party a mere two days before crossed the Swedish frontier. Nevertheless, despite this late attestation, he managed to attend events sponsored by various nationalistic organisations prior to departure.[4] In contrast to **Gauffin,** he had not served in Finland because of his young age. This did not prevent him from attempting to enlist in the *SS* one year later; a second attempt (November 1942) was also unsuccessful. Undeterred, **Nässil** became involved with a suspected illegal *Waffen-SS* recruiting office, operated by former *SS* volunteers, in Sweden during most 1943.[5]

On 18 November 1943 **Gauffin** and **Nässil** were waiting in Oslo where they had signed their enlistment contracts. One specially added provision stated that they wanted to serve in Finland. In a subsequent letter to Sweden, **Gauffin** explained how he was waiting to be sent to Germany for training and then "…continue the struggle against the Bolsheviks and Jews…"[6] **Nässil** was sent to Sennheim following two weeks in Norway, whilst **Gauffin** remained. After three weeks at Sennheim, **Nässil** continued to Hallein outside Salzburg where he remained for just a few days before being shipped to Finland via Danzig.[7] **Nässil** reached the *'Nord' Division* in February 1944. Here he reunited with **Gauffin** who had earlier been assigned to the same company.[8]

During the early months of 1944, the *'Nord' Division* continued the defensive battles in Northern-Karelia. As the *Schijäger-Kompanie* had returned home during the summer of 1943, another Norwegian volunteer unit – the *2. Politi-Kompaniet,* a Norwegian military police Company – had been created. This newly-raised unit was assigned to the *'Nord' Division* from the autumn of 1943.

Nässil and **Gauffin** served together until early April 1944 when the latter was killed in action at Karpolat; the sole Swede to fall in action with the *'Nord' Division*.[9] He left behind a wife and two sons, the children subsequently being adopted.[10]

The *2. Politi-Kompaniet* left Finland the same month as **Gauffin** was killed, as their contracts had expired. By this time, the former *Schijäger-Kompanie* had been expanded to a full battalion and had been returned to the front. During the fighting in summer 1944, they suffered terrible losses when their positions at the Hassleman and Karpolat heights were overrun by Soviet forces. Unit losses amounted to 140 killed or captured in two days of savage fighting. The Soviet summer offensive was finally brought to a halt in July 1944. Following this, the fighting died down even for the hard-pressed Norwegian volunteers. That same month, another Norwegian Police Company (*3. Politi-Kompaniet*) which had been in training at the Sennheim camp between April and July 1944, was dispatched to Finland where it was subsumed by the *'Nord' Division*.[11] By then, even more Swedes – with aspirations to serve on the Finnish front – had joined the *SS*. Indeed, one of their number was sent there with police-company.

In April, **Gunnar Holmström**, a Swedish soldier born in 1900, had made his way to Norway. Already well known by the Swedish police, he had been charged with both fraud and forgery. During his military service in the early 1920's, he had been sentenced to four months in prison for

3 P.M. to case Hd. 2622/40. Stockholm 10.2.44. (MUST)
4 Document concerning Nässil, Per Bertil. F. 20/1 24. Stockholm, 14.3.45. (MUST)
5 Document concerning Nässil, Per Bertil. F. 20/1 24. 31.5.45. (MUST)
6 Letter from Harry Gauffin. Oslo, 18.11.43. (Author's archive)
7 Interrogation of Per Bertil Nässil, 5.10.44. P3955. (RA)
8 Ibid.
9 Interrogation of Per Bertil Nässil, 5.10.44. P3955. (RA)
10 Information related by Harry Gauffin's grandchild to the author, 16/2/2011. (Author's archive)
11 *SS-Skijäger Batalion 'Norge'*, Geir Brenden/Arne Håkon Thomassen. LE Förlag. 2010.

deserting from his Regiment. He was motivated by hatred of communism, and believed he could not remain in Sweden as "…everybody were communists…" On deserting his labour Company, he stole the unit's official rubber stamp and booklet utilized for the issuance of official travel passes which he used to gain access to the Norwegian border. By showing the forged certificate to border guards, he hoped to enter this secured area. Falsely stating that he was "Corporal Karlsson" with remit to reconnoitre for a newly-raised unit, he aroused suspicion and was placed under house arrest pending further orders. His captor's carelessness allowed him to escape by row boat to Norway during the night of 22 April,[12] after which he joined the *SS* and was dispatched to Germany for military training.[13]

Two more volunteers joined the *SS* via Norway during May. **Åke Lindbeck** (b. 1922) was caught by Swedish border guards on 5 May claiming he was uninterested in politics, but still hoped for a German victory which would bring change to Europe. However, the main motive behind his wish to enlist was hatred for his civilian employer and a worsening home situation. Unable to reason with his elderly father, he considered foreign military service could be no worse than his current situation.[14] Three days after **Lindbeck's** attempt, another Swede made his way to Norway: **Hans Ulrik Johansson** (b. 1923) who had previously served in the Norwegian *SS*-Legion during 1942-1943. As the situation on the Finnish front drastically turned in favour of the Soviet Union, he once again decided to take action against what he considered to be a dire threat to both Sweden and Finland.[15] His subsequent desertion during a period of leave from the Swedish navy was not unexpected, as his mother had already informed the Swedish police upon seeing a revealing diary entry that related a desire to rejoin the *SS*. The relationship between the son and mother had been far from amiable, an attempt by the former to strangle the latter being followed by heartfelt repentance. In general, she felt that he mostly wanted to remain idle and expected his mother would support him. The desire to re-enlist, she surmised, was just a ploy to regain her sympathies.[16]

Just two days after **Johansson, Åke Lindbeck** managed to escape and made it across the border.[17] Both were brought to Oslo where they signed their service contracts. **Johansson** was, a few days later, sent to the Sennheim Camp in charge of a group of Norwegian volunteers. These latter were to undergo basic training, while he himself, already a trained and experienced combat soldier, was shipped-off to Finland by boat at the close of May 1944.[18] Whilst most of the volunteers spent the summer of 1944 undergoing basic training, one of their number joined the *'Nord' Division* in June 1944 – **Tage Furugård,** (b. 1913). He felt, as with some of the other Swedish volunteers, that he had been deceived. His hope had been to serve in the German forces, however not in the *Waffen-SS* but within the *Luftwaffe*. **Furugård**, who was directly related to **Birger Furugård,** the leader of one of the major national socialist parties in Sweden, had been a pilot within the Swedish air force. In 1941 he discovered his wife was having an affair and demanded a divorce. The unfortunate domestic situation made him desperate, and he sought escape by service with the Finnish air force in July 1943. He was, following a month of infantry combat with the *Swedish volunteer company,* finally accepted. However, after one month he found the day-to-day

12 Personal folder of Gunnar Malkus Holmström, b. 28/3 1900. (MUST)
13 Based on a photo of Gunnar Holmström where he is posing with other officers and NCOs of the 3. Politi-Kompani. (Geir Brenden archive)
14 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)
15 P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)
16 P.M. to case Hd. 598/43. P4393. 26.8.43. (RA)
17 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)
18 P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)

routine dull. A promised transfer to the *Luftwaffe* by the German commandant in Helsinki was accepted, but **Furugård**, on arrival in Berlin in October 1943, was informed he would have to serve in the *Waffen-SS*. Basic training and subsequent transfer to the *'Nord' Division* followed soon afterwards.[19]

Åke Lindbeck was dispatched from Norway to Sennheim during the last days of June and trained with – **Gunnar Holmström** and **Tage von Reinals** – two other Swedish volunteers destined to serve in *'Nord' Division*.[20] The latter was a 17-year-old Count born to a Swedish mother and German father. Raised by a National Socialist reverend, he had attempted to join the Swedish army, but was rejected for being underage. Still seeking a life of adventure, he instead found employment as a seaman. Whilst docked in Norway he decided to desert and enlist in the *SS* instead.[21] Following two months of training, **Lindbeck**, and, more than likely, the other volunteers, was sent to the front in Finland.[22] **Holmström** had been promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer* and, although scheduled to join *Schijäger Btl. Norge,* who had travelled to Finland with the *3. Politi-Kompaniet*.[23] However, on reaching Oulu, he was injured in a bar fight and admitted to a hospital on the 24 August 1944. Released just six days later, he decided to flee from the assembly point and deserted while awaiting transport to the front. German field police found him intoxicated in Oulu the next day. He was, pending courts martial, placed in a nearby work camp, whereupon he once again managed to escape on the 9 September.[24] Exactly what happened afterwards remains unknown. Listed as missing by Swedish authorities in 1946, he later returned home, but was never properly interrogated.[25] Around the same time **Tage Furugård** left the Division after being wounded in August 1944. Sent to Norway in October 1944 following treatment in a German hospital he finally ended up within the Reichsicherungshauptamt.[26]

In September, **Hans Ulrik Johansson** was placed in the first Company of the *Schi-Jäger Btl. Norge* and in the unit received his promotion to *SS-Rottenführer* approximately one month later.[27] That same month, on 4 September 1944, Finland agreed to a cease fire with the Soviet Union and, as part of the agreement, demanded that all German units depart from Finnish soil before 19 September. This proved impossible in the short time allotted, which was why the *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division Nord,* together with other hard-pressed German units, had to make a fighting withdrawal from northern Finland to Norway. Known as *Operation Birke*, found them fighting against their former ally during the 'Lapland War'. **Bertil Nässil**, disillusioned by news of the ceasefire, lost interest in the conflict and was granted to leave to Berlin, where he arrived on 20 September 1944.[28] While there he discovered his parents had made several attempts to have him sent home for enlisting without their permission. Their efforts were ultimately successful and he was returned home on 3 October.[29]

19 Interrogation of Tage Bertil Furugård. 29.5.45. (MUST)
20 Report Monday 14 May 1945. From H.A.910/45. concerning von Rainals. (RA)
21 AT 8.10.48. 50:6/4 A (RA) and P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)
22 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)
23 An das Gericht der *6. SS-Geb-Div. 'Nord'*. Auf *SS-Jäg.Schi-Btl. "Norge"*. 2.10.44. (Author's archive)
24 *SS-Feldgendarmeriekompanie 6*, *6-SS-Geb. Div 'Nord'*. *Gruppe Oulu*. Betrifft: *SS-Uscha*. Gunnar Holmström, *3. Norw. Freiw. Pol. Kp.* 13.9.44. (Author's archive)
25 Letter from Gothenburg police to Stockholm police. 8.10.46. (RA)
26 Interrogation of Tage Bertil Furugård. 29.5.45. (MUST)
27 Personalbogen in Straf- und disziplinarsachen, *Rottenführer* Hans-Ulrik Johansson. 27.1.45. (Author's archive)
28 Interrogation of Per Bertil Nässil, 5.10.44. P3955. (RA)
29 Document concerning Nässil, Per Bertil. F. 20/1 24. Stockholm, 14/3 1945. (MUST)

NCOs and officers of the Norwegian 3rd Police Company. Second man from the left is *SS-Unterscharführer* Gunnar Holmström. (Geir Brenden)

Both the *3. Politi-Kompani* and *Schijäger-Btl Norge* participated in the retreat during and, as far as can be ascertained, **Åke Lindbeck, Hans Ulrik Johansson,** and **Tage von Reinals** passed through northern Finland.[30] It is also possible that another Swede joined the *'Nord' Division* during this period. At least two more Swedes participated in the fighting retreat. Surprisingly, one of the two was female! On the morning of 25 October 1944, a stolen Swedish Army truck raced towards the Finnish border; in it were **Maj-Britt Sellberg** (b.1924) and **Kurt Pettersson** (b.1926). Having both served in northern Sweden, she was a nurse and he was attached to an air surveillance company. They intended to enlist, as a driver and nurse respectively, in the German armed forces. Abandoning the truck close to the border, they stole a row boat and crossed to Finland, where they managed to attach themselves to a German unit.[31]

The crossing was illegal and dangerous. For **Sellberg**, however, it was the second time in just a few days, having, along with two other nurses, the trio helped the wounded Finn back to his homeland. They discovered, on their return, that the crossing was illegal and, on conviction, the resultant punishment could be as much as three month's imprisonment. **Pettersson**, on the other hand, had previously served with a comrade who explained he intended to desert and join the German forces. Unable to dissuade him, he declined to participate. However, **Pettersson**, following a conversation with **Sellberg** a few days later, agreed to accompany the latter in a second risky cross-border journey. No one else besides **Sellberg** agreed to the plan which was put into action that evening. **Sellberg** claims that **Pettersson** was motivated by an abiding hatred of communism, while she was frightened of the lengthy jail sentence.[32]

30 P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)

31 Interrogation of Maj-Britt Sellberg, 29.12.44 and Interrogation with Kurt Nestor Pettersson, 13.1.47. (MUST)

32 Ibid.

Bertil Nässil: the badge on his right sleeve is an Edelweiss flower, which was worn by *SS* and Heer *Gebirgsjäger* units. (Bosse B. archive)

After crossing the border, they found a German unit to which they stated their reasons, were interrogated and given alcohol. **Pettersson's** claim that he was interrogated by a member of the *SS*, leads the author to believe that the unit they found was the *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division Nord.* What happened afterwards remains uncertain, as both **Sellberg** and **Pettersson** gave differing accounts of subsequent events. What is clear is that they were split up; **Sellberg** followed a German ambulance with a group of nurses towards Norway and **Pettersson** joined the unit he had been interrogated by.[33]

The retreat towards the Norwegian frontier continued. German forces burned several villages and skirmished with pursuing Finnish units. In November 1944, the *'Nord' Division* finally achieved their goal following an epic march of 1,600 kilometres. It was, after crossing the border, decided that both the *3. Politi-Kompaniet* and *SS-Schijäger-Btl. Norge* were to remain in Norway. The *SS-Schijäger-Btl. Norge* was dispatched to Oslo in December 1944, after which further discussions arose concerning its use. The Germans requested that it should be deployed against the Norwegian resistance movement, but Norwegian National Socialist leader **Vidkun Quisling,** fearing the battalion was to be put into action outside of the country, strongly protested. The unit was reinforced by the addition of three companies of German motorized Infantry and turned into the *SS-Polizei-Schijäger-Btl. 506 (motorisiert).* It would remain in Norway for the rest of the war.

33 Ibid.

The *'Nord' Division* on the Western Front, 1944/45

The *6. SS-Gebirgsjäger-Division 'Nord'* was transported from Norway to Denmark for refitting in December. Amongst its personnel was **Åke Lindbeck**.[34] It is quite possible that **Pettersson** was also a member at this stage. The authorities, following **Pettersson** and **Sellberg's** illegal flight from Sweden in October 1944, heard nothing further from the fugitives. But, in December 1944 **Sellberg** was discovered in Norway and, with the able assistance of the Swedish Consulate in Oslo, returned home on 23 December. She was the first of the two to undergo interrogation during which she claimed to have lost contact with **Pettersson** after their separation in Finland. She encountered him again in Narvik sometime after the retreat. Attired in German uniform, he now claimed to be a volunteer. This was the last time **Sellberg** saw him. Sent to Oslo where news was received that she would be sent to Germany as a nursing trainee, she changed her mind and eventually managed to return home. Despite not having participated in any active service, she still received monetary compensation from the Germans. Thus, she might be considered to be the only, or at least one of the few, Swedish women who served with the *Waffen-SS* during the World War II.[35]

One more Swede came joined the ranks of the division in 1944/45. His name was **Kjell Malte Wallin** (b. 1904), a *SS-Hauptscharführer,* who had served with the *SS* since 1942. He left Sweden as early as 1927, and had worked as a salesman across Europe. In 1939 was residing in England, but was deported. Relocating to Holland, he was once again deported on suspicion of espionage. Lastly he settled down in Belgium – but was soon enough arrested and would remain in captivity until the German invasion in 1940, after which he was freed. He then moved back to Holland where he found employment with the *Kriegsmarine* as a purchaser prior to joining the *SS* in 1942, where he held a similar service assignment, working in Haag and Amersforth. He was arrested by the *Gestapo* for embezzlement in 1943 and spent 8 months as an inmate in the Amersforth concentration camp pending trail. Found guilty in 1944, he was sentenced to four months in prison, but as he already spent a long period in confinement, it was decided he would be released and returned to service. By then the war had reached the Western Front and, instead of returning to his former assignment, he found himself transferred to a *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment*. Because, according to **Wallin**, of the laborious nature – hauling heavy crates of ammunition, etc. – he was soon ill with a heart condition that eventually led to transfer to *'Nord' Division's* training battalion for recovery.[36]

After refitting in Denmark the *'Nord' Division* was sent to south-eastern France, where it participated in *Operation Nordwind* during January 1945. In Norway at the same time, ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Hans Ulrik Johansson** had lost interest in further service with the *SS* and considered that as Finland had agreed to a cease-fire, the Soviets now threatened Sweden.[37] He thus informed his commander of plans to visit a friend attached to the 3rd Company on the afternoon on the 3 January 1945. Seizing the opportunity, **Johansson** deserted to Sweden and never returned.[38] Despite this, his commanding officer described him as a radical national socialist and a model soldier. **Johansson** subsequently informed Swedish authorities that he still held on to his National Socialist convictions and ideas, but he could not tolerate the Germans' extraordinarily brutal methods. He would be sentenced to one month in prison for desertion and illegal border crossing.[39]

34 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)

35 Interrogation of Maj-Britt Sellberg, 29.12.44 and Interrogation with Kurt Nestor Pettersson, 13.1.47. (MUST)

36 Compilation to case Hd. 2873/41. 15.10.48. P4688. (RA)

37 P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)

38 Personalbogen in Straf- und disziplinarsachen, *Rottenführer* Hans-Ulrik Johansson. 27.1.45 (Author's archive) and document concerning the desertion of Hans-Ulrik Johansson, 5.1.45. (Author's archive)

39 Addition to summary of case Hd. 598/43. P4393. 25.1.43. (RA)

This photo of Hans-Ulrik Johansson was included with documents concerning his desertion. (Bosse B. archive)

Higher *SS* authorities would be investigating **Johansson's** desertion until 11 April 1945, when it was finally dismissed, as they recognized they would have no chance of finding him.[40] He had, much to his good fortune, been back in Sweden for several months. Another man in his unit, **Harry Dahl,** a Norwegian who made a desertion attempt but was captured, was summarily executed eight days after it was decided to drop the charges against **Johansson**.

It was not just **Johansson** and **Dahl** who encountered problems with the German military authorities. When he deserted had his fellow Swedish countryman in the *Schijäger-Btl.,* **Tage von Rainals** was arrested. **Johansson** claimed that this was because he had been stealing from comrades, but in several newspaper articles based on documents released after **von Rainals**' trial, another story emerges: as the soldiers of the Battalion reached Norway they discovered their pay had "gone missing" – they were promised a grand party as compensation. This was something which **von Rainals** and some of his comrades found outrageous, so they decided to sabotage the event. They cut the electrical wires to the kitchen, burned the tobacco and poured out all the alcohol they did not intend to consume themselves. However, an officer caught them in the act and placed them under arrest. This resulted in a lengthy 18-month sentence. Luckily for **von Rainals**, the war ended before he served out the sentence in its entirety. The wayward volunteer was able to return home following the capitulation of the German troops in Norway.[41]

40 Document from *SS*-und Polizeigericht IX, Oslo. 11.4.45. (Author's archive)

41 Arb. 9.10.48. 50:6/4 A (RA) and P.M. to case P4393. 18.1.45. (RA)

On the western front, the *'Nord' Division* had taken the town of Wingen on 4 January, where parts of the Division held out for a week. Finally, as *Operation Nordwind* ground down to a disappointing halt, they withdrew. During the following February, the unit was put into action at the Moder River close to the town of Bitche. **Åke Lindbecks'** unit was surrounded by the US Army in the town of Ulm that same month. A failed attempt to break-out of the encirclement led to his capture.[42] At the end of that month ***SS-Hauptscharführer* Kjell Malte Wallin** left the division. Hospitalized for a heart condition, he was later transferred to the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin, but had no real service assignment.[43]

During the last few months of the war, the *'Nord' Division* made a fighting withdrawal, and on the 2 April 1945 it capitulated to the US army outside Wittgenborn. **Kurt Pettersson** returned to Sweden at the end of June 1945 and was then interrogated. He essentially told the same story as **Sellberg**, but vehemently denied being a volunteer or that he had met her while dressed in a German uniform. Instead, he claimed that on reaching Norway, he was given the option to either join the *SS* or become a prisoner. As a result, he suddenly changed his mind and thus became a prisoner.[44] However, based on the fact that **Sellberg** claimed to have met him dressed in German uniform, combined with some of the information he had given during police interrogation, I suspect that he might have been a member of the *'Nord' Division* and actually participated in combat operations on the Western Front. He further claimed being sent (December 1944) to Aarhus after imprisonment. This was the very same town that the *'Nord' Division* was shipped to and during the same time frame. However, he also claimed to have been dispatched onwards to Stettin, and from there to a labour camp outside Frankfurt am Main, where he was forced to work at a nearby airfield. He was released after the camp was liberated by the US Army at the end of March 1945. With American help he was able to return home at the end of June.[45] While no solid evidence has been found concerning his service in the *'Nord' Division*, one should note that town where the division finally surrendered, Wittgenborg, is situated less than an hour's drive away from Frankfurt am Main. Of course it is possible to **Sellberg** lied about having met him dressed in uniform, and it could have been just a coincidence that he happened to be at approximately the same locations as the division during the last phase of the war, but he may been lying. This would have been especially true when one considers that it was, in 1945, hardly popular to admit to having served in the *SS*. **Åke Lindbeck** who had been captured by the US Army in February, was actually placed in a prisoner of war camp outside Frankfurt am Main. He would remain there until 13 August 1946 when he was released; he then worked in Munich as a construction worker for several months before finally returning home, with the assistance of the Swedish Red Cross, in July 1947.[46]

At the end of February 1945, it should also be noted, three Swedes who had been sent to Berlin in order to serve in a sabotage unit behind the enemy lines, applied for transfer and were subsequently accepted into the *Schijäger-Bat*. They only did so, however, to expedite their return to Sweden and avoid almost certain death behind enemy lines.[47] **Kjell Malte Wallin** was also

42 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)
43 Compilation to case Hd. 2873/41. 15.10.48. P4688. (RA)
44 Interrogation with Maj-Britt Sellberg, 29.12.44 and Interrogation with Kurt Nestor Pettersson, 13.1.47. (MUST)
45 Ibid.
46 Report, Tuesday 20 August 1947 concerning Karl Olof Åke Lindbeck. H.A: 750/47. (RA)
47 Interrogation of Walther Fjellmann. (RA)

transferred from the *SS-Hauptamt* at the beginning of April 1945. From there he made his way back to Sweden dressed in civilian clothes.[48]

Conclusion

In comparison to the number of *SS* volunteers in general, it cannot be said that the *'Nord' Division* was a unit which contained many Swedes. However, relatively speaking, given the fact that only some 180-200 Swedish citizens are believed to have served in the *SS*, it was one of the major representative divisions. Twelve Swedes are confirmed to have served with either the *'Nord' Division*, or a variety of Norwegian sub-units, plus an additional two whose service careers remain unconfirmed. As always with the Swedish volunteers in question, not everyone actually participated in combat. Six, or eight if we are to include the unconfirmed, participated in action either in Finland or on the Western Front. The remaining four, including one instructor, requested transfer to the Norwegian Ski Battalion in order to make their way home.

It is possible, however, that there might have been more Swedes serving with the Norwegian sub-units. As seen with **Frank Gustavsson**, there were Swedish citizens who were born in Norway who considered themselves Norwegian. It would come as no surprise to me if several such individuals were present.

48 Compilation of case Hd. 2873/41. 15.10.48. P4688. (RA)

9

Swedish *SS* Volunteers in Various Combat Formations

Introduction

Some Swedish nationals fought, in addition to *'Wiking'*, *'Nordland'* and *'Nord'* divisions, in other *Waffen SS* formations. These are exceptions and will thus only be featured briefly. Several transferred either to or from the three aforementioned divisions, whilst others remained within a formation during their service.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, those volunteers who served in full strength *SS* divisions. The second part examines volunteers in minor units such as volunteer legions and various *Kampfgruppen*. A German *Kampfgruppe* can be described as a battle group – a hastily extemporised unit that could comprise everything from a few regiments to a few companies.

SERVICE IN FULL-STRENGTH *SS* DIVISIONS

Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler'

The *Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler'*(*LSSAH*) was the oldest of the *SS* formation having its origins in the *Stabswache* eight man party bodyguard established in 1923. The unit was re-designated as the *Stosstruppe Adolf Hitler* soon after its creation, but was disbanded following the failed beer hall putsch when **Hitler** and other Nazi leaders were jailed. A new bodyguard (*Stabswache Berlin*) was created following his release in 1925. The reconstituted unit would grow from a select 120-man unit into a full-scale *SS-Panzer Division* by 1944 considered by many to be one of the truly elite *SS* divisions. Subsequent service in Poland, France and during 1939-40 was followed by deployment during the Balkan *Feldzug* and Operation Barbarossa in 1941. A brief interregnum in Italy during 1943 was followed by re-deployment to the Eastern Front where it remained until transfer to the Western theatre in 1944. LSSAH spent the final months of the war in Hungary and Austria.

At least three or four Swedes served in the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*. **Thorolf Hillblad** served briefly as a *SS-Kriegsberichter* with the unit during 1941, and is thus featured in the chapter on war correspondents. He was well aware of another Swede, **Robert Bengtsson**, who served in the *SS-Flak-Abt 1 LSSAH.* Both were proud of this as they believed they were the sole Swedes within the Division.[1] This was in fact incorrect, **Bengtsson** volunteered for the *SS* after denial to join the Finnish volunteers in 1941. Previous service in the Winter War to January 1940, was followed by a return home and compulsory military service. Denied Finnish service a second time after completing military service in August 1941, he travelled to Norway with the hope of gaining entry to Finland by an indirect route. It was here that the offer to join the *SS* presented itself.

1 Thorolf Hillblad to Lennart Westberg correspondence, 1.12.86. (Author's archive)

Bengtsson accepted so long as his contract stipulated service against the Red Army only. By then, another Swede was in fact already serving with the Division: **Lars Blom**, a German born Swedish officer candidate (b. 1903) in with dual citizenship, was the first Swedish national to join the *LSSAH* on the 10 June 1941.[2] Initial service as an *SS-Unterscharführer* in *SS-Artillerie-Regiment 1 LSSAH* was followed by action during the catastrophic winter battles of 1941/42, for which he was awarded the *Ostmedaille*.[3] At the same time **Bengtsson** underwent basic training at Sennheim and Klagenfurt camps from 15 December until transfer to a anti-aircraft school in Arolsen at the end of January 1942.[4]

The training having ended on 31 March, **Bengtsson** was selected to serve within the newly formed *LSSAH* flak battalion.[5] After arriving on the Eastern Front during summer 1942, the whole Division was transferred to France for refit and reorganization as an *SS Panzergrenadier-Division* in consequence of the costly battle of the Sea of Azov. It was during this Western respite that the Division was put on high alert following the Allied landings in North Africa. Meanwhile, the situation at Stalingrad took a turn for the worse and the *LSSAH* entrained for the Eastern Front. **Lars Blom** was sent to a training course at the *Steyr* vehicles manufacturing plant during this period.[6] He also chose to resign his Swedish citizenship for reasons that remain unclear.

Blom was back with *SS-Art-Rgt. 1 LSSAH* in January with a new service assignment as chief mechanic and on the 30th of January was promoted to *SS Oberscharführer*.[7] At the same time **Bengtsson** and *SS-Flak-Abteilung 1* left France where he was serving as heavy tractoe driver. The Division went into position outside Kharkov together with the *Das Reich* and *Totenkopf* divisions.

It is worth mentioning that yet another Swede claimed to have served with *LSSAH* during the Kharkov fighting. ***SS-Obersturmführer* Kurt Birger Norberg** related this during subsequent interrogation by the Swedish police following his desertion in March 1943. **Norberg** had served as a lieutenant in the Swedish home guard and saw action as volunteer in the Finland during 1939-40. Travelling to Norway to enlist in the *SS* in November 1942, he was, without prior officer training, promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer* on 20 November 1942 whereupon he initially served at the *SS-Hauptamt*.[8] These basic facts are supported by German documentation. Nevertheless, **Norberg** also claimed to have trained with the *LSSAH* at the Lichterfelde barracks:

> The training with the *Leibstandarte* was very similar to Swedish training. Fundamental to all service was infantry training. Stormtroop actions were often rehearsed. The indoctrination of a ruthless forward spirit was the goal of all education. Exercises in the defence always ended with a counter-attack, which gave the troops the idea that this was always the intention.
>
> After a period of infantry training, which for 17-year-olds amounted to a year, but for older age groups usually three months, the special training commenced. *Leibstandarte* is motorized with large quantities of various types of vehicles; virtually all were tracked. Norberg indicates that anti-tank guns calibre ranging from 5.5cm, 7.5cm and 8.5cm, of which the latter is considered to be the only one which meets modern requirements. Assault guns exist up to

2 Dienstlaufbahn, Lars Blom (NARA/BDC) *SS*-Stammkarte, Lars Blom. (NARA/BDC)
3 Personalangaben, Lars Blom. (NARA/BDC)
4 *SS*-Soldbuch, Robert Bengtsson. (Author's archive)
5 Ibid.
6 Beurteilung über den *SS-Obscha*. Blom. *Kraftfahrtechnische Lehranstalt der SS*, 30 März 1944. (NARA/BDC)
7 Ibid.
8 *SS* Soldbuch, Kurt Birger Norberg.

Robert Bengtsson was the Swede who served with the *LSSAH* the longest. Here he is serving as *SS-Rottenführer*. The decorations are the Assault Badge and Wound Badge in Black. (Månsson-Westberg archive)

15cm calibre. Assault is carried out frequently so that *Panzergrenadiers* ride in their armoured vehicles right up to the hostile strongpoints after which the side-doors are opened and the soldiers rush to the opponents."[9]

Norberg also claimed to have fallen ill in January 1943, whereupon he visited the Swedish Consulate to seek their assistance to return home.[10] The *SS*, on becoming aware of this, summarily dispatched the disaffected Swede to Kharkov where he was attached to a *LSSAH Kampfgruppe*.[11] According to his testimony, the retreat which followed went well even if his unit suffered severe casualties against Soviet Guards units. After just a few weeks of combat he became ill once again and was evacuated.

This testimony, however, remains questionable. Norberg was unpopular with *SS* contemporaries and was convicted of fraud on several occasions after the war. The claims about combat with the *LSSAH* lack supporting evidence in German documentation. In addition, during subsequent interrogations, he contradicted himself by claiming to have served with the unit for just two days before falling ill from malaria and then, in another interrogation, alters this account by claiming to

9 P.M. regarding German conditions by former Second Lieutenant of intendenturkårens reserve Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

10 Report: Tuesday 23 March 1943 concerning Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

11 P.M. concerning German conditions by former Second Lieutenant of intendenturkårens reserve Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

have served for two weeks before falling ill with high fever.[12] Moreover, in a post-war interview he denied service with the *LSSAH*, claiming service with *Regiment 'Nordland'* instead. This dubious assertion also lacks support from available German documents thus making it possible that he never served at the front at all.[13]

Kharkov had been abandoned against **Hitler's** orders in February 1943. Recaptured after fierce street battles on 15 March, **Bengtsson** was awarded the General Assault Badge for his participation in the fighting.[14]

The Division spent April and May resting in preparing for coming summer battles. On the 1 July **Bengtsson** was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class and was posted close to Kursk, where history's largest tank battle – *Operation "Zitadelle"* – commenced on 5 July. *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* printed a letter about his experiences during the battle:

> The battle is fantastic! All day our *Panzergrenadier* Company moved forward with 'Tigers' and I am yet to see any Russian anti-tank gun capable of damaging their armour. You become so calm in the middle of all the excitement when, during a Russian assault, you lie flat on the ground and glance toward the steel colossi and see them [Tiger tanks] lying there so still and just shoot back whilst Russian shells hit the armour like peas. It's like pouring water on a goose. Nothing can bite on the Tigers, and the Russians have to flee. At noon, we took an anti-tank ditch without supporting tanks or assault guns. It rained scrap over us, but it went well anyway. Now it is evening. We will soon rest for a few hours, but soon it will be the pioneers turn to head out and clear minefields, so that the coast is clear to continue the fight at dawn.[15]

The battle, despite **Bengtsson's** glowing account, was a Soviet victory. When this became evident, a Swedish left-wing newspaper mocked his effusive letter by ironically suggesting he who was forced to flee.

Following this, the Division pulled back towards Belgorod and from there entrained for Italy to refit. It returned to the *Ostfront* in late October after transformation into an *SS-Panzer Division*. **Blom** left the Division around the same time to attend a training course at the *Kraftfahrtechnische Lehranstalt der SS* in Vienna.[16] This meant that he, unlike **Bengtsson**, missed the hard fighting at the close of 1943. In early January 1944, **Bengtson's** unit had sustained such heavy losses that it was reduced to two battle groups. On the night between 7/8 January they re-assembled in Januschpol from where they retreated towards Stopok. On 9 January the retreat continued to Lossowa, where they hard-pressed unit received some rest. Remaining equipment was down to a single 8.8cm gun, two 3.7cm and two 20mm automatic cannons. On 16 January they were relieved by a *Wehrmacht* division and the remaining elements of the anti-aircraft battalion dispersed amongst other units of the Division. In late February the Division moved to Belgium for reconstruction. Constituent units, however, could not be withdrawn immediately. Thus **Bengtsson** remained at the sharp end until 8 April.[17]

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12 Report: Tuesday 23 March 1943 concerning Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

13 Interview with Kurt Birger Norberg 27.8.01. (Author's archive)

14 *SS* Soldbuch, Robert Bengtsson. (Author's archive)

15 *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* 17.7.43. (KB)

16 Beurteilung über den *SS-Obscha*. Blom. *Kraftfahrtechnische Lehranstalt der SS*, 30 März 1944. (NARA/BDC)

17 *SS* Soldbuch, Robert Bengtsson. (Author's archive)

At the front with *LSSAH*: Robert Bengtsson is standing to the left. (Månsson-Westberg archive)

Blom, having left the Vienna-based training at the same time, had been promoted to the officer candidate rank of *SS-Standartenoberjunker d. Reserve* prior to his return to the Division.[18] *LSSAH* was placed on high alert on 6 June 1944 when D-Day, the allied invasion of France commenced. The German high command believed the Normandy landings were a diversion and that the real invasion would take place at Pas-de-Calais. Two days later, **Bengtsson** was transferred from his unit to the *Stabs. Kp. II./SS-Pz.Rgt 1 LSSAH* under command of the legendary ***SS-Obersturmbannführer* Jochen Peiper**.[19] The order to move out to France finally came on the 19 June, but as **Bengtsson** had signed a contract stating that he would only fight against the Red Army, he was instead placed at a vehicle depot in Baden. **Blom** was finally promoted to *SS-Untersturmführer* two days later.

LSSAH fought in Normandy, and later during the Battle of the Bulge, **Bengtsson** remained in Baden, where he received his promotion to *SS-Unterscharführer* on the 1 December 1944.[20]

LSSAH was, as the end of the war neared, once again transferred to the *Ostfront* and participated in the fighting in Hungary and Austria, why **Bengtsson** returned to the Division. The last entry in his *Soldbuch* is from 7 May 1945 when he was promoted to *SS-Oberscharführer* and awarded the Iron Cross First Class before being taken prisoner by the Americans.[21] **Bengtsson** committed suicide two decades later while **Blom** died in the British occupied zone in 1978.

18 *SS-Führungshauptamt* document concerning promotion to *SS-Stbj d. Res*. Lars Blom. (NARA/BDC)

19 *SS*-Soldbuch, Robert Bengtsson. (Author's archive)

20 Ibid.

21 Act: 50:6 / 4 A. Vol. 2. Nazism; 'Swedish Nazi parties and abroad. Germany. *Waffen-SS* on other German military service'.

2. SS-Panzer Division 'Das Reich'

The unit that eventually became *2. SS-Panzer Division 'Das Reich'* had its origins in the in the early *SS Verfügungstruppen*. The two early *SS* Regiments, '*Deutschland' and 'Germania'* were subsequently organised and, following the annexation of Austria in 1938, '*Der Führer'* was raised in late 1939 as the final component to the *SS Verfügungs Division*. The newly-raised Division saw action in the west in 1940, *Germania"* and *Deutschland*, however, having previously participated in the Polish campaign. From December 1940, the Division was given the sobriquet *'Deutschland'*, but only held this title until the end of January 1941, when it instead was subsequently entitled '*Reich'*, and in 1942, *'Das Reich'*. It became a full-scale *SS Panzer Division* during 1943. It would be committed in combat on the Eastern Front from 1941, and the larger parts of the Division were, during 1942, sent to France for refitting before returning to the *Ostfront*. Following participation in the Kharkov fighting and the Kursk offensive, the Division fought at Normandy and, in late 1944, the Ardennes offensive. The final months of the war found it remnants conducting a fighting withdrawal on the Eastern Front towards Vienna where they went into American captivity.

A number of Swedish volunteers came to serve with S*S Infanterie Ersatz Btl. 'Der Führer'* in Stralsund during early 1941 where they received basic infantry training. Since they only spent a short amount of time there before transfer to Klagenfurt training camp and the *SS Infanterie Ersatz-Batalion* '*Westland'* of *'Wiking' Division,* they are featured in Chapter 5.

It is also likely that a single Swede served as a Battalion officer. When nobleman and former mental patient ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Harry Raab** returned after a mere two months service in August of 1941, he was searched by the Swedish police. Among his belongings was his *Soldbuch* from which a few notes were made, unfortunately nothing to identify the unit he belonged to, but it issuance at Stralsund implied the training battalion of *Der Führer*. His service is almost not worth mentioning, as it only lasted two months before he was sent home. He was killed by a sniper in 1942 whilst serving as a volunteer in Finland.[22]

The last volunteer to be mentioned in connection with *Das Reich Division* is **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** who had duel German and Swedish citizenship. After participating in an officer course at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* which ended in March of 1944, he was sent to a number of armoured training schools where he received instruction on the *PzKpw V Panther* tank. He proceeded, following promotion to *SS Untersturmführer* on 21 June 1944, to an armoured training unit in Latvia before being transferred to the *SS Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 11 'Nordland'* in August.[23] As a tanker he was a bit misplaced in an armoured reconnaissance battalion, thus he received an order to report to the *SS Panzer Regiment 2 Das Reich*.[24] Everything indicates he never actually left *'Nordland'* and that he after a while he was transferred to *SS Panzer Abteilung 11 'Hermann von Salza'* of *'Nordland' Division* in which he served for a brief time.[25]

Swedes in Various *Totenkopf* Units and *3. SS Division 'Totenkopf'*

The *Totenkopfverbände* was created in 1933 at the Dachau concentration camp and became a separate department of the *SS*, following the infamous 'Night of the Long Knives', from the *Allgemeine SS* in 1934. The first Swede to join a *Totenkopf* formation was **Sven-Erik Olsson**. Born in Estonia 1923

22 P.M. to case Hd 4232/41. (MUST)

23 P.M. dated 19.7.45: Information provided by Erik Wallin about P-S. Baecklund: 'Served in the same company as Wallin in the Courland …'. (RA)

24 *SS-Führungshauptamt* document IIa nr. 30379. (NARA/BDC)

25 Personalverfügung der *SS-Untersturmführer* Baecklund, Sigurd. 20 Sept 1944. (NARA/BDC)

to a German mother and a Swedish father, he was a Swedish citizen. **Olsson** studied at a German school in Estonia and participated in the Baltic-German youth organization. On 8 November 1939 he joined the *16.(MG)/SS-Totenkopf-Rekruten-Standarten*. The increased need for additional *SS* divisions combined with the competition between the *Wehrmacht* and the *SS* over who could recruit the German youth led to the creation of the *3. SS Division Totenkopf* and the *4. SS-Polizei-Division*. The *SS* managed to overcome their recruiting problems by recruiting from their own, thus *Totenkopf Division*, created in the end of 1939, recruits were gleaned from the *SS-Totenkopfverbände.* The *SS Polizei-Division* recruited from the police which was a part of the *SS* since 1936.

In the beginning of May 1940 **Olsson** was transferred to the *14./SS Totenkopf Regiment 14*. About four months later, **Olaf Jürgenssen,** born in Vladivostok of Swedish parents, also joined the *SS Totenkopf Infanterie-Regiment 14* at Buchenwald concentration camp.[26]

It is uncertain whether or not **Jürgenssen** ever visited Sweden during the pre-war years, but he was nonetheless a Swedish citizen. Having moved to Germany with his family during after the First World War, he became a member of the *Hitlerjugend*, *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and *Allgemeine-SS* before joining the *SS Totenkopf Infanterie Regiment 14*.[27] In October 1940, **Olsson** was transferred to the signalling platoon. The unit would, at the end of 1941, be posted in Holland where in participated in coastal guard duty, something that is specifically mentioned in **Olsson's** and **Jürgenssen's** service records.[28]

Olsson was promoted to ***SS-Sturmmann*** during 1941; that summer he was chosen to become an NCO candidate before being sent to the *Kommandostab Reichsführer SS* in East-Prussia during the fall of 1941 to act as signaller. This assignment ended his service within the *Totenkopf*.[29] **Sven-Erik Olsson** would later be transferred to the *10. SS-Panzer Division 'Frundsberg'* in February 1943 as a radio operator. He would fight with the Division in France and on the Eastern Front where served as personal radio operator to the divisional commander ***SS-Oberführer* Heinz Harmel** before being wounded during the breakout from the Falaise Pocket in August 1944. **Olsson** was back with the division during the final fighting in Pomerania in 1945. He also earned the Cross in Gold, making him, in addition to **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson**, one of the highest decorated Swedes. He was captured by the Western Allies in 1945 and returned to Sweden in 1947.

Jürgenssen remained within the various *Totenkopf* units, but was most probably transferred from the *SS Totenkopf-Infanterie Regiment 14* to either *SS-Totenkopf Infanterie-Regiment 6* or *7* which served in Finland during 1941 as part of *SS Kampfgruppe 'Nord'*. His service record states that in addition to guard duty in Holland, he also participated in the Karelia fighting. During 1941 he was removed from the *Totenkopf* in order to earn a medical training. **Jürgenssen** later served at a Vienna military hospital and as a doctor's assistant with *SS Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 16 'Reichsführer-SS'*. His fate after 1944 remains unknown. It remains uncertain if any Swedes served in the *Totenkopf-Division* from 1941 until 1943. During May 1943, at least one more Swedish citizen would fight with the Division. **Karl-Martin Ågrahn** deserted from his unit A7 in northern Sweden on the 22 February 1943 and crossed the Finnish border to join the *SS*. He was, following initial training at the Sennheim, sent to the NCO school at Grafenwöhr from where he was sent to the *Totenkopf Division* at Bobrossisk in early May 1943. Service of just six weeks was followed by a return to Grafenwöhr and attachment to *11. SS Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Nordland'* from which he deserted that autumn.[30]

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26 *SS* document concerning *SS-Untersturmführer d.r.* Dr. Jürgenssen. (NARA/BDC)

27 *SS* Stammkarte, Dr. Olaf Jürgenssen. (NARA/BDC)

28 *SS* document concerning *Untersturmführer d.r.* Dr. Jürgenssen. (NARA/BDC)

29 Agte, p.126.

30 P.M. to case XII 83/Ä 2830. P5642. (RA)

Sven-Erik Olsson (left) during service with *'Frundsberg'*. Here he is seen together with Division commander Heinz Harmel during the fighting on the Western Front. The gun barrel is from a Tiger tank. (Göran Hargestam)

MINOR UNITS

Freikorps 'Danmark'

One of the most famous Swedish volunteers, **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson**, who eventually would be promoted to the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* (1945) and awarded (1944) the highly regarded *Ehrenblattspange des Deutsches Heer* whilst serving with *'Nordland' Division* began his career within the *SS* in a Danish volunteer unit, the *Freikorps 'Danmark'*.

Born in the town of Karlskrona, Sweden in 1910, **Pehrsson** was a chemist by profession. Unable to find a lasting employment at home, he decided to emigrate to Denmark in 1934.[31] There he met the woman who became his wife in 1936, and through his brother-in-law gained employment at a paint laboratory where he remained until enlisting in the *SS* in 1941. **Pehrsson** was, despite vehement denials after the war, a member of the Danish National Socialist Party (*DNSAP*).

Freikorps 'Danmark' was one of several so-called 'legions' raised in occupied countries following the start of Operation Barbarossa; in Norway, there was the equivalent *Den Norske Legion* and in Holland *Freiwillige Legion 'Nederland'.* It was not long before many of these volunteers became disillusioned inasmuch as they had expected to fight as Danish and Norwegian troops with

31 To County Superintendent Otto Rosengren, county administration Malmö. 15.10.45. XII 83 / Â 3198 (RA) and Report, October 27 1945 Malmö Police. XII 83 / Â 3198th (RA), and *SS*-Stammkarte, Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. (NARA)

German equipment; not as German soldiers recruited in Denmark and Norway. The unit was organised a few days after the invasion of the Soviet Union when representatives of the *DNSAP* contacted Danish artillery officer **C.P. Kryssing** for assistance in organizing the unit. **Kryssing**, although not a member of *DSNAP*, accepted command on 29 June 1941, following which the unit's existence was proclaimed.

The first volunteers left Denmark on the 19 July. Amongst them was **Armand Johansson** (b. 1923) whose nationality has not been fully established. The Swedish government considered him a Danish citizen, while he considered himself Swedish. What is clear however, is that his father was Swedish and that during the post-war period he remained in Sweden. Although not a Swedish volunteer per sé, he was at least a volunteer of Swedish descent.[32] He enlisted with close friend, **Jörgen Larsen** and together with the other volunteers, they were dispatched to Hamburg.[33]

One week later (July 25) **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** enlisted in the newly-raised *Freikorps*. He claimed, during interrogation, that his reason for this was apolitical and had more to do with the desire for gainful employment with the German firm of *I.G. Farben*.[34] His wife however believed this story untrue. In a post-war interview, she stated his enlistment was due to the fact that he was a convinced National Socialist. He often socialized frequently with Danish National Socialists and even invited them home, something she disliked.[35] He travelled from Denmark via Hamburg and Berlin to Posen-Treskau where infantry training commenced in September 1941. **Pehrsson** served as *SS-Rottenführer* in the fourth Company the following January.[36] **Armand Johansson** never got that far. His friend **Larsen** was just 15 years old when they enlisted. Denied the required parental permission, **Johansson** forged the necessary papers which were quickly identified as fraudulent. Both were deported to Denmark – the latter being sentenced to 80 days for falsifying papers.[37]

The training was not without difficulties. Major problems began to erupt between the unit commander **Kryssing** and his men due to the fact that the majority of the latter were National Socialists who had difficulties accepting the unit's apolitical status. Their main spokesman – ***SS-Oberscharführer* Hallas** – a noteworthy National Socialist author – was arrested. This led to an atmosphere of mutiny and disaffection following which angry volunteers scribbled slogans such as "Remove the democrat Kryssing!" on the camp walls. **Kryssing**, the situation now untenable, was removed from command on 23 February. The Dane **Christian Frederick von Schalburg** who up till then had served with *'Wiking' Division* was appointed in his place.

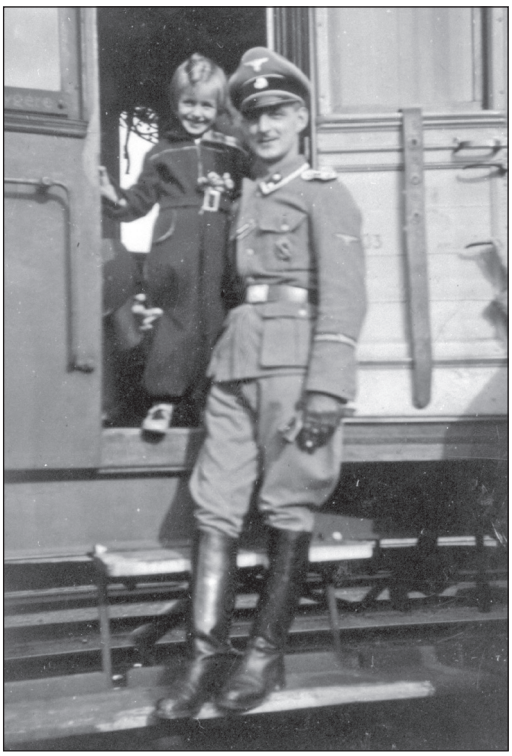
It was during spring 1942 that **Pehrsson** participated in the NCO course that led to his elevation to *SS-Unterscharführer*.[38] *Freikorps 'Danmark'* was ready for combat in May 1942 Transported by air to the beleaguered Totenkopf Division in the Demjansk Pocket, **Pehrsson** had by then been assigned as leader of 2nd Company's heavy machine-gun section. Conditions in the pocket were severe, units being engaged in savage trench warfare. On 2 June 1942 **Pehrsson** was promoted to *SS-Oberscharführer* and became a heavy weapons (two heavy machine gun squads and one heavy mortar squad) platoon leader.[39]

32 P.M. concerning Danish citizen Armand Kaj Johansson, born June 1923. 7.10.52. Ä3431. (RA)
33 Report 3 February 1944, concerning Johansson, Armand Kaj, 3 February 1943. Ä3431. (RA)
34 *SS*-Stammkarte, sid 1. (NARA/BDC)
35 P.M. concerning conversation with Edith Kornå (Pehrsson's first wife). 84.11.19. (Author's archive)
36 Hans-Gösta Pehrsson correspondence abstract. 21.1.42. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)
37 Report concerning Johansson 3 February 1943, Armand Kaj. Ä3431. (RA)
38 Agte, p. 121. According to the author Patrick Agte, this information comes from veterans who served with Pehrsson. Email from Agte to the author 2009. (Author's archive)
39 Krigserfarenheter från Östfronten 1941-45. Typescript notes by H-G. Pehrsson. Undated. (Author's archive)

SS-Unterscharführer Hans-Gösta Pehrsson is standing in the centre with the visor cap. Note the absence of decorations. (Bosse B. archive)

It was on that date, during which the *Freikorps* annihilated the Robja bridgehead, that commander **von Schalburg** fell in combat. **Pehrsson** wrote of the subsequent summer fighting:

> In the summer of 1942 our Company held a wooded peninsula in the swamps for a week under continuous Russian attacks with heavy losses in killed and wounded. Everything had to be carried through the knee-deep mud. All available soldiers evacuated the wounded and carried forward ammunition; the number killed was becoming troublesome. I then tried to use the prisoners [as labourers] we had captured during every Russian breakthrough; some 20 men total, but it was quite impossible as they demanded food first. Prevalent food shortages meant I was in no mood for fun. I attempted to get them started at gunpoint, waving the weapon about threateningly and shouting "Davai! Raboti!" [Forward! Work!] I may as well have used a stick. They just shrugged their shoulders and said "Chleb Raboti. Jet chleb raboti Nyet!" [Bread! Work! No bread! No work!] There was nothing else to do than obtain a loaf of bread. They took their time eating before engaging the task with enthusiasm.
>
> This battle of Bul Dobovitzi village, which I will return to later, was just one of many. I just want to mention one of the main reasons why this position was held for so long. It was due to my Company commander's (a Danish coastal artillery captain named **Bonnek**) energy and foresight,. We had remained in that position for a month, experiencing few large assaults, but undergoing much artillery activity. I was with half of my heavy platoon plus two rifle squads on a small hill in front of the forest and could shoot flanking fire at the Company section. The rest of the platoon was on both sides of the forest and shot flanking fire in front of me. The Company commander declared competitions between groups and platoons who did the most



A few months after the first photograph was taken: Pehrsson has not only been decorated but also promoted. Note the rare *"Freikorps Danmark"* cuff title. (Bosse B. archive)

to develop and improve their positions. I personally found it to be a great mental relaxation, so introduced position work for every man relieved from night outpost duty. It was impossible to stick your nose over the edge during the day.

Down in the swamps the construction was organized so that they built a large log cabin around a couple of trees, raised the floor with logs to make it water-free and dug a trench around the framework. Content with this, a clay swamp soil, which we let run off at a branch grating, was, when moderately wet and sticky, placed over woven branches and logs to a firm but springy layer which was about 60cm thick. The addition of rocks or pieces of metal, if available, could stand 10cm artillery rounds. In my position at the islet none of the strong-points were put out of action after direct bombardment. We had grass-lined holes for grenades every two feet, and three alternative positions for each MG.

Once, when we had taken Bul Dubovitz and occupied the positions, we were suddenly fired upon from a shelter in the rear. We were masters of the place, so calmly and objectively started to throw grenades in the firing slits in the usual way. But it did not help ... Finally, after we threw in a bundle charge on each side, two Russians came out with their hands in the air ... A cinema technician from Moscow and a Ukrainian shoemaker, both agreed to become volunteers, taking part in the fighting six days later as MG crew. It was during a furious frontal assault in which we were completely torn asunder and forced back through our own minefields with heavy losses that both 'Ivans' went missing. It wasn't until we went forward again that we found them sheltering in a bush and more than happy to be amongst us again. One fell a few days later, but the other served as an excellent shoemaker during my time with the Company.[40]

40 Krigserfarenheter från Östfronten 1941-45. Typescript notes H-G. Pehrsson. Undated. (Author's archive)

Pehrsson was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class in early August. This would not be his sole award, for he also earned an Infantry Assault Badge and, after being wounded, he received the Wound Badge. A Front Fighters Badge of the DNSAP, which he proudly wore on his uniform, was awarded the following September.[41] His service with *Freikorps "Danmark"* ended two months later with a transfer to the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* for officer training. He was, following graduation, assigned to *'Nordland' Division*.

Armand Johansson was released from prison in April 1942, Re-enlisting in *Freikorps 'Danmark"* in December, he was dispatched to Sennheim camp for basic training. Falling ill, he remained there until June 1943.[42] The remains of the *Freikorps* had, by then, been removed from the front to Grafenwöhr training camp, where they would form the core of *Rgt. 'Danmark'* of the *'Nordland' Division*.[43] **Johansson** joined the new-formed Regiment instead (See Chapter 6).

Den Norske Legion – Freiwilligen Legion Norwegen

As with the Danish volunteers, a Norwegian legion was raised in 1941. At home it was known as *Den Norske Legion*; in Germany as *Freiwilligen Legion Norwegen*. Norwegians had already served with *'Wiking' Division* prior to announcement of the new unit's organisation. The Legion, nonetheless, would soon be far more popular amongst volunteers wanting to fight against the Soviet Union. The reason for this was quite simple. Announcement of its establishment was accompanied by a rumour that it would be the basis of a reconstituted Norwegian army that would fight for Finland on Norway's behalf. Several who applied were Norwegian officers without sympathy for National Socialistic ideology or **Vidkun Quisling**. In fact, many fought against their current occupiers during the April 1940 invasion and early recruitment posters showed soldiers dressed in Norwegian uniforms without German insignia. It soon became clear that this "new army" was nothing more than an illusion. In late July, the legion, which consisted of just one battalion of three companies and a heavy weapons section, known as *Viken*, left Norway for Germany. While there they were quickly subsumed into the *SS* receiving German uniforms and equipment. This soon caused conflicts, but the real deathblow would come several months later.

Swedish national **Thure Carlsson** (born Norway in 1922 to Swedish parents) joined the Norske Legion during training. Raised in Norway and Sweden, his family settled permanently in Bergen in 1939.[44] An ardent National Socialist who had joined the *Nasjonal Samling*-party under leadership of **Quisling** a year before enlisting in the *SS*, he later claimed to have volunteered for the defence of Finland.[45]

The dreams of a quasi-independent Norwegian army were crushed by the time the battalion was ready for combat in February 1942. Hopes of Finnish service were dashed by deployment on the Leningrad front. There they would participate in fierce position warfare of patrols, raids and artillery duels. It was during a patrol of 16 April that former Norwegian officer **Ragnar Berg** led his men straight into the fire of a Russian MG, which killed him along with seven volunteers. The remainder of the patrol turn back, with many wounded.

Carlsson, after a two months training, joined the unit's anti-tank company as runner and driver.[46] **Hans-Ulrik Johansson** was another Swede who served. A sailor (b.1923) in civil life, he

41 *Under hagekors og Dannebrog*, p. 155 and *Europas Freiwillige der Waffen-SS*, p. 121.
42 Report concerning Johansson, Armand Kaj 3 February 1943. Ä3431. (RA)
43 *Under hagekors og Dannebrog*, p. 185.
44 Report Monday 2 June 1947 concerning Carlsson, Ture Ivan. (RA)
45 Ibid and *Norsk rettstidende* with the verdict from the trial against Ture Carlsson. 1946. (Author's archive)
46 *Norsk rettstidende* with the verdict from the trial against Ture Carlsson. 1946. (Author's archive)

contacted German authorities in 1941 about civilian employment in Germany. It is more than likely that he never received a reply. Unhappy employment as a woodcutter during spring of 1941, he travelled to Norway to enlist with the *SS* on 20 May 1942.[47] Transferred to occupied France for basic training, subsequent receipt a letter from his sister urged him to return to home.[48] He was, however, sent to Klagenfurt that August. A failed attempt to flee to Italy was followed by a six week period under arrest.[49] He later described how, during an interrogation by the Swedish police, he came to realise the hasty enlistment was a great mistake and admitted, having abandoned the ideology, harbouring National Socialist proclivities throughout the late 1930s. **Johansson** had, nonetheless, sworn an oath of allegiance, but felt compelled under threat of confinement in a concentration camp.[50] He chose voluntary return following the escape attempt. The subsequent courts martial deferred punishment by ruling desertion due to "childish ignorance". The reason for this, he later claimed, was assignment to a company of foreigners compounded by the fact that the German language was unknown to him.[51] As a result, he applied, his training over, for transfer to *Den Norske Legion*. This was approved and by November 1942 he reached their *Ersatz-Kompanie* in Mitau, Latvia, where he was equipped with the standard (K98) German bolt action rifle prior to entrainment for the Leningrad front.[52] Another volunteer, ***SS-Hauptscharführer* Nils Bertil Forsman**, is said to have been served as an instructor for the *Ersatz-Kompanie* for one month in late 1942. What he taught the neophyte Norwegian volunteers remains unknown and he only held this position until New Year's 1942-43, when he was returned to Berlin.[53] From there he returned home in March 1943.

At the end of November, *Den Norske Legion* was relieved from the frontline for a few days rest, but was forced back into action 3 December after a Soviet breakthrough in the sector held by *Freiwilligen Legion 'Nederland'*, The situation, following heavy fighting, was restored. **Johansson** described Netherland volunteers as worthless, throwing their weapons away and fleeing. He also observed that deploying several foreign units in the same sector was a bad idea. Indeed, a bitter rivalry soon erupted between them. His opinion in regard to the Netherlands volunteers is indicative of this rivalry, as many post-war researchers believe the Dutch legion actually performed better than its Norwegian equivalent.[54]

The deployment of Norwegian volunteers to Russia had a negative impact on morale. Indeed, a few actually deserted to the Russians, but, according to **Johansson**, the number of deserters from other volunteer units was far greater, the "Norwegians were far too proud to hand themselves over to the unintelligent Russians." In addition, he also observed, the number of Soviet deserters was

47 Personalbogen in Straf- und disziplinarsachen, *Rottenführer* Hans-Ulrik Johansson. 27.1.45. (Author's archive)

48 Letter to Hans Ulrik Johansson from his sister. 21.7.42. P4393. (RA)

49 P.M. concerning sailor Hans Ulrik Johansson. P4393. 12.3.43. (RA)

50 P.M. concerning the Swedish citizen, sailor Hans Ulrik Johansson, västmannagatan 28, Stockholm. 29.4.43. P4393. (RA)

51 Document concerning *SS*-Man H-U Johansson. From the Swedish Consulate, Berlin. 12.2.43. (Author's archive)

52 P.M. concerning the Swedish citizen, sailor Hans Ulrik Johansson, västmannagatan 28, Stockholm. 29.4.43. P4393. (RA)

53 P.M. concerning the Swedish citizen Erik Harald Jonsson and his enlistment in the German Waffen S.S. m.m. (MUST)

54 P.M. concerning the Swedish citizen, sailor Hans Ulrik Johansson, västmannagatan 28, Stockholm. 29.4.43. P4393. (RA)

far beyond any of those originating from the German lines. To this he added added: "In general, the Germans immediately shot every deserter".[55]

Den Norske Legion was, after several months of trench warfare, relieved of frontline duties in March 1943. **Heinrich Himmler** personally thanked them for their commitment and urged them to join *Rgt. 'Norge'* of the soon to be created *'Nordland' Division*. Only 300 of the approximately 700-800 answered his call. This number was reinforced by new volunteers travelling direct from Norway or by those requesting transfer from *'Wiking' Division*. A number of Swedes were attached to the unit during its final months of existence, but none appear to have served at the front. One of them, **Sigfrid Lindblad**, served in the *Ersatz-Batalion der Legion* and was about to travel from Graz to Holmestrand.[56]

Carlsson had by then left the unit. Sent to a German hospital in December 1942, he would remained there until May 1943 after which he returned to Norway. This did not, however, end his involvement with the Norwegian nationalistic movements and the *SS*. Employed as a *Sicherheitspolizei (SiPo)* driver, he assisted the Germans in their struggle against the resistance movement and later also joined the *Germanske SS Norge*, a Norwegian formation which was the Teutonic equivalent to the *Allgemeine SS*.[57]

The majority of Swedish volunteers were gathered in the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* consisting of *'Nordland' Division* and the *Nederland Brigade* from 1943. Most served in *Rgt. 'Norge'* during initial training. Several who joined prior to the disbandment of the Legion (**John-Erik Eriksson** and **Ingmar Somberg)**, were sent to the training company of the Legion prior to Grafenwöhr training camp where the new corps was being formed.

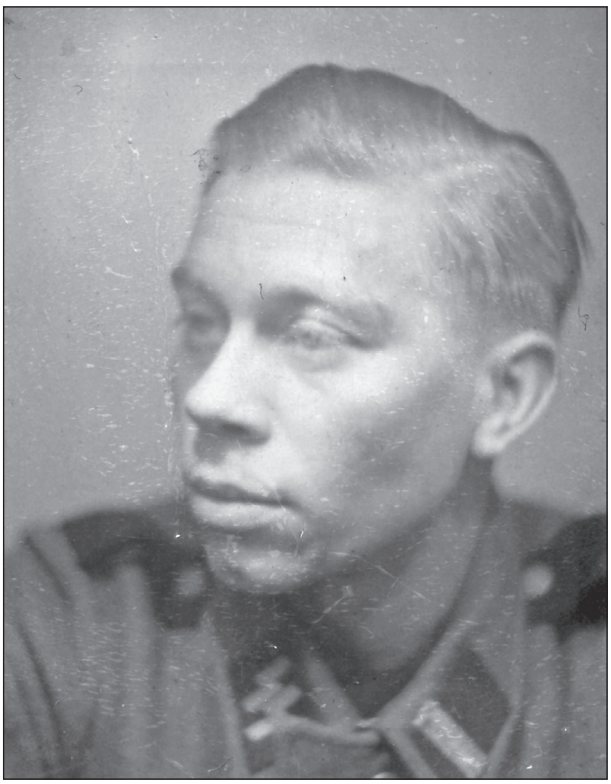
Hans-Ulrik Johansson, his service with *Den Norske Legion* over, returned to Oslo from where he left for Sweden. Desertion from the Swedish navy in 1944 was succeeded by re-enlistment in the *SS*, and assignment to Norwegian *Schijäger-Battalion*. Having first claimed that he returned from the *SS* the first time as a deserter, he later changed this story when he returned home a second time from the *SS* claiming that he claimed to have deserted to avoid being questioned about his previous service.[58]

It was not illegal for Swedes to join the *SS*, so they could freely return without expectations of trouble from the authorities. The situation was different in Norway where all volunteers were considered traitors. Most received long prison sentences. **Thure Carlsson** was, despite his Swedish citizenship, sentenced to six years hard labour. Extradition to Sweden after serving two thirds of his sentence would be arranged at a later date. The prisoner, taking matters in his own hands, escaped to Sweden in 1947. The Norwegian authorities requested extradition to no avail.[59]

SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'

A number of Swedish volunteers were sent to the Seelager training camp in Latvia, where several *SS*-training units were stationed during the spring and summer of 1944. As all of these volunteers had served, or would come to serve, within the *III. Germanisches SS Panzer Korps*, their basic information such as motives for joining the *SS* and other personal details can be found in Chapter 6. Time spent in Seelager training camp and *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'* will be covered in this chapter.

55 Ibid.
56 Kleine Fahrschein für die *Waffen-SS*. Sigfrid Linblad. (Author's archive)
57 *Norsk rettstidende* with the verdict from the trial against Ture Carlsson. 1946. (Author's archive)
58 Case compilation Hd. 598/43. P4393. (RA)
59 Letter from Swedish police to Norwegian police. 25.6.47. (RA)



John-Erik Eriksson. (Göran Hargestam)

In February 1944, **John-Erik Eriksson**, a former member of the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* of the *'Nordland' Division*, was transferred to Seelager camp. Having participated in the formation of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer Korps* at the Grafenwöhr training camp he subsequently served as a member of the *SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 23 'Norge'* before transferring *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11.* Service in Croatia was followed by a short period of leave in late 1943. Returning to his unit in February 1944, **Eriksson** requested a second discharge. His case under review, it was decided to place him in a rear echelon unit attached to Seelager Camp.[60] Here the disaffected Swede was joined by several of his fellow countrymen. **Johan Westrin** arrived that spring. A former member of *Rgt. 'Norge'* and the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11,* he was, as opposed to **Eriksson**, there to participate in the NCO training course. A member of an armoured reconnaissance battalion, he was assigned to *SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Ausbildungs. u. Ersatz-Abteilung 2*.[61] Both men were veterans of the Finnish Winter War. **Eriksson** had, nevertheless been sent home after being classified unfit for service.[62]

When the *11. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang*, the officer candidate course held at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz,* ended in March 1944, two Swedish graduates would afterwards be sent to the camp for further training. **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez**, who graduated first in the class, was sent there at an unknown date. Some sources claims he served with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* during June 1944,

60 Interrogation of John Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA)

61 Westrin is listed as serving in the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Ausb-u-Ers-Abt* on 31.5.44. (NARA/BDC)

62 P.M. to case XII 83/Ä 2233. H.A. 648/45. (RA)

before being sent to Seelager where he served in the same unit as **Westrin**.[63] The other volunteer, ***SS-Standartenoberjunker*** **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** had undergone the course with **Eldh-Albiez** at Bad Tölz**..** As it had been suggested that he would be used as a platoon leader within a tank unit, he ended up in the *SS-Panzer Ausbildungs Regiment 'Seelager'*, under command of **Martin Gross**, an experienced and highly decorated officer who was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross whilst serving as a battalion commander in *SS-Panzer-Rgt. 1 LSSAH*.[64]

The training continued through the summer of 1944. An officer of the *Sicherheitsdienst*, made an attempt to recruit **Baecklund** into the *SD,* offering him "economically beneficial assignments". **Baecklund**, recognising this not so subtle attempt to recruit him as a spy, told the officer that he joined the *SS* to fight and nothing else.[65] This was the second attempt to recruit him, the first having occurred during basic training at Sennheim in early 1943. The officer offering the earlier opportunity was fellow Swede ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Sven Rydén**, who according to several volunteers, was in charge of the camp's political indoctrination.[66] On the 31 May 1944, ***SS-Unterscharführer*** **Johan Westrin** applied for permission to marry, but it remains uncertain if he ever did so.[67] On the 21 June 1944, both **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez** and **Per-Sigurd Baecklund** received promotion to the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer*.[68] The situation on the Eastern Front changed dramatically the following day as a resurgent Red Army launched Operation Bagration*,* the long awaited summer offensive against *Heeresgruppe Mitte*. The grand assault tore open the entire German defence on the central front. The sorely-tried German defenders, following four weeks of fierce fighting, were pushed back some 500 km westwards as far as the suburbs of Warsaw. *Heeresgruppe "Mitte"* lost 19 out of 33 divisions.

The Germans needed to take swift action to counter the rapid Soviet advances This led to the creation of a number of so-called 'alarm units'. One of these was *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross',* which was formed from Seelager camp units to maintain touch between *Heeresgruppe 'Nord'* and *Heeresgruppe Mitte.* This connection had been severed on the 24 July.[69] **Martin Gross** who up till then had served as commander of *SS-Panzer-Ausbildung und Ersatz Regiment*, was appointed commander of the new unit. ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Baecklund**, despite service with the training regiment, did not join *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'*. He was sent to the tank training school in Bergen on 27 July 1944.[70] Conversely his three remaining countrymen ended up in the hastily formed unit, while **Baecklund** ended up in *'Nordland' Division*.

The brigade found itself at the sharp end of the fighting from 1 August; the official unit designation was adopted three days later. *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Ausbildungs-Abteilung 2,* in which both **Johan Westrin** and ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez** had served during its time at Seelager, became the brigade's armoured reconnaissance battalion. **John-Erik Eriksson** saw action with the 3rd Company of the brigade infantry battalion under command of the ***SS-Hauptsturmführer*** **Walther Runge**. This sub-unit was often referred to as *Battalion 'Runge'*.

63 See *Führerliste der Waffen-SS* by John P. Moore.

64 Lebenslauf from his *SS*-Fragebogen. (NARA/BDC) and Allgemeine Beurteilung der persönlichkeit, Per-Sigurd Baecklund. 30375. Der kommandeur der Lehgruppe B. (NARA/BDC)

65 Interrogation of Per-Sigurd Baecklund. 22.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)

66 Ibid.

67 Verlobungs und Heiratsgesuch. Johan Westrin, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Ers-Abt*. (NARA/BDC)

68 Stammkarte, Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez (NARA/BDC) and Stammkarte, Per-Sigurd Baecklund. (NARA/BDC)

69 Zur Geschichte der *SS*-Panzer-Brigade "Groß" (Zusammenstellung Roland Pfeiffer- MIHAG D, Stand Dez.2005).

70 Aktennotiz 30381 Berlin 27.7.44. (NARA/BDC)

SS-Untersturmführer Wolfgang Eldh-Albiez. (Author's archive)

Soviet troops managed to establish a bridgehead at Irlava on the 14 August 1944. This forced the brigade to mount an immediate counter-attack. It was during this fighting that **Eldh-Albeiz,** who more than likely served as adjutant to Commander **Hans-Henning Heuer** and later as a platoon commander in the Battalion's 1st Company, sustained a serious shrapnel injury to the head.[71] He was, according to his wife, wounded whilst engaging in a bridge demolition operation, a dangerous assignment originally tasked to another soldier.[72] It remained uncertain whether or not he would survive. Indeed, Swedish liaison officer **Gunnar Eklöf** reported him as likely killed in action to the Swedish authorities in 1945.[73] **Eldh-Albiez** had, however, against all odds, survived. The aftermath of several operations left him suffering from epilepsy. Still convalescing, his grandmother secured his release from a British prison camp near Hamburg in 1945. Back in Sweden, he underwent surgery again during which he met a nurse who became his wife. The surgery freed him of epilepsy, although paralysis in one leg and both arms remained. He never again spoke of his *SS* service, which he felt had been a mistake.[74]

SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross' carried on the desperate fighting to re-establish and hold the communications between the *Heeresgruppen* during the following weeks. On 22 August the link was restored and the road between Tuccum and Riga was once again in German hands. Following this, the larger parts of the brigade were transported by rail to Estonia in order to cover the

71 Zur Geschichte der *SS* Panzer-Brigade 'Groß' (Zusammenstellung Roland Pfeiffer- MIHAG D, Stand Dez.2005) and casualty report from *SS*-Pz.Brig 'Gross', undated. (PK arkiv)

72 P.M. concerning phone conversation with Eldh-Albiez wife. 25.10.85. (Author's archive)

73 Document in Gunnar Eklöf's security police folder with information about other volunteers. P3592. (RA)

74 P.M. concerning phone conversation with Eldh-Albiez wife. 25.10.85. (Author's archive)

open southern flank of *Armee Abteilung 'Narwa'.* They soon became involved in counter-attacks around the southern tip of Lake Peipus. However, as Soviet advances made the retention of Estonia untenable, the country was evacuated on the 18 September. *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'* was by then engaged in Latvia, suffering heavy losses on the road between Bauske and the Latvian capital Riga between 12-21 September.[75]

One casualty of this fighting was ***SS-Rottenführer* John-Erik Eriksson.** He received a shrapnel wound to the head on the 23 September after which he was evacuated. The entire left side of his tunic had been perforated by shrapnel, but a thick layer of undergarments prevented the deadly projectiles from entering his body. He requested, while in hospital, a discharge for the third time, which was approved. Discharged after surgery, he returned home via Denmark and Norway on 2 February 1945.[76] Decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class, the Black Wound Badge and the Infantry Assault Badge,[77] he was, despite numerous discharge applications, considered to have fulfilled his terms of service.[78]

The last remaining Swede in the brigade, **Johan Westrin**, had been promoted to *SS-Oberscharführer* whilst serving in *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 'Gross'*.[79] On 29 September, the unit was placed in *XXXX. Panzer-Korps* reserve, an assignment retained until 3 October. On 5 October the brigade participated in a counter-attack at Kelme (Lithuania), approximately 100 kilometres south of the Latvian border. On that day, **Johan Westrin** was killed in action according to a veteran eyewitness thus becoming the sole Swedish fatality of *SS-Panzer Brigade 'Gross'*. He was, however, already recorded as missing in Sweden since his 1943 desertion. Forty-one years passed before **Westrin** was officially declared dead, following a familial request to settle an inheritance dispute, by a Swedish court His date of death was declared to be 31 May 1944.[80] It is, however, not entirely clear when he was killed. The few possessions he left behind, according to the family attorney, had been posted to his parents in August; his last diary entry was made in late May 1944. However, according to a veteran who served with **Westrin,** he was killed on 5 October after his patrol stumbled onto a booby trap that wiped out an entire squad.[81]

Swedes in Graz and the *Jagdverband 'Nordwest'* Company

SS-Pz-Gren-Ausb-und-Ers-Bat 11, another notable unit containing Swedish volunteers, was a training and replacement unit for *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* situated in Graz. It was during service within it ranks that a number of Swedes received their training during the final months of the war.[82] The unit, even one of non-combatant character, was pressed into combat – often against partisans and as *Kampfgruppe 'Schweitzer,* at the last stage of the conflict.

The camp experiences of two Swedish nationals, **Lennart Isidor Jansson** and **Verner Ulrik Löfgren**, can be pieced together from surviving documents. **Löfgren** was a former seaman who had been detained in Sweden after being found guilty of various theft crimes. He had, as an impressionable 18-year-old in 1941, enquired about service with the *French Foreign Legion*, but it

75 Zur Geschichte der *SS*-Panzer-Brigade "Groß" (Zusammenstellung Roland Pfeiffer- MIHAG D, Stand Dez.2005).
76 Interrogation of John Erik Eriksson, 31.3.45. H.A. 648/45. (RA)
77 Award documents for John Erik Eriksson. (Author's archive)
78 Entlassungsschein John Erik Eriksson. (Author's archive)
79 *SS* document without name, *SS-Obscha*. Johan Westrin. Nr. 117154. (NARA/BDC)
80 Decision by Svegs District Court to declare Johan Westrin deceased. 1985-09-18. (Author's archive)
81 Attorney's letter. 23.3.87. (Author's archive)
82 Information provided by Walther Fjellman during interrogation by Swedish police. (RA)

BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM

John Erik Eriksson, SS-Rottenführer
(NAME, DIENSTGRAD)

SS-Pz.-Brigade "Gross", 3.(SS)Inf.Btl.II
(TRUPPENTEIL, DIENSTSTELLE)

IST AUF GRUND

SEINER AM 23. 9. 1944 ERLITTENEN

1 MALIGEN VERWUNDUNG ~~BESCHÄDIGUNG~~

DAS

VERWUNDETENABZEICHEN

IN Schwarz

VERLIEHEN WORDEN.

O.U. , DEN 6. Oktober 1944

(UNTERSCHRIFT)

Stabsarzt u. Chefarzt
(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLE)

IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS

VERLEIHE ICH
DEM

SS- Rottenführer
John-Erik Eriksohn,
Kompanie Stenglin
Einheit Runge

DAS

EISERNE KREUZ
2. KLASSE

Im Felde , den 29.Aug. 1944

(TRUPPENTEIL)

Generalmajor und Kommandeur
der 81. Infanterie-Division

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

Johan Westrin.
(Månsson-Westberg archive)

BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM SS-Rottenführer
(DIENSTGRAD)

John Eriksohn
(VOR- UND ZUNAME)

Einheit Runge
(TRUPPENTEIL)

VERLEIHE ICH DAS

INFANTERIE-STURMABZEICHEN
IN SILBER

O.U., den 11. Oktober 1944
(ORT UND DATUM)

(UNTERSCHRIFT)

SS-Hauptsturmführer und Kommandeur
(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

Decoration documents awarded to John-Erik Eriksson whilst serving with *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross'*, including the Iron Cross Second Class, Infantry Assault Badge and Black Wound Badge. (Author's archive)

was only after being re-admitted to hospital that he decided to put his plan of voluntary military participation in the works. Escaping from hospital on 3 March 1944, he made his way to Denmark, where he was arrested by the *Gestapo* following a restaurant brawl. Lack of identity papers placed him under suspicion with the likely prospect of incarceration for many months; enlistment in the *SS* provided escape from this fate. Training at Sennheim and Ellwangen, where he met **Jansson** (b.1923), followed. Dispatched to Graz in August 1944, they were engaged against Yugoslav partisans shortly afterwards. Both soon grew tired of the German military discipline and, as with other fellow countrymen serving in *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* were to do, decided to desert to the enemy. Departing a few days after arrival, the fully armed deserters were captured. Declaring their willingness to fight against the Germans, they were employed as ammunition carriers for two months as a loyalty test. **Löfgren's** adventure as a partisan ended in mid-November 1944 when he was wounded by shrapnel, whereupon he was admitted for treatment at a partisan hospital.[83]

The final outcome of the war seemed clear by late 1944 and early 1945. There were, nonetheless, remaining Swedes willing to sacrifice themselves for the Third Reich. A number of these served with *SS-Pz-Gren-Ausb-u.-Ers-Bat 11*. One of them, **Walther Fjellman** (b. 1919) had been a member of the *SSS* party since 1942. It was during a party in November 1944 that he met **Curt Stenberg**, whose recent attempt to enlist in the *SS* failed miserably at the Swedish – Norwegian frontier. **Fjellman**, after discussing this and the fact that he was about to become unemployed, agreed to join him in a second attempt. The duo successfully crossed the border in late November 1944. **Fjellman** was sent on to the Graz training camp in in December; **Stenberg** was employed by the *SD* in Norway. **Fjellman**, during his time at Graz, served with other Swedish enlistees. The following were present during Christmas of 1944:

Arne Bernhardsson-Pettersson (b.1919) Enlisted 24 November 1944
Gösta Alban Clase, (b. Germany 1924) Swedish citizen who emigrated with his family to Sweden during the 1930's. Moved to occupied Poland, where his father managed a large farm, in 1943; enlisted in Posen July 1944.[84]
Carl Erik Lantz, (b.1926) Left Sweden with **Sven Erik Sjöström** (b.1924) to join *Germanske SS Norge* in October 1944.
Bengt Lofthammar (b. 1918) Ex-Swedish NCO Regiment *I2*; enlisted 1944.
Stig Arne Ridderstedt (b.1925) Enlisted 1944.
Sven Adilis Svensson (b. 1912) Crossed Swedish–Norwegian frontier in June 1944.[85]
Knut Posse (b. 1926) Swedish count who served in Finland during summer 1944; enlisted in Oslo that same year.[86]

The latter had joined the *SS* during the late autumn when Finland ceased hostilities with the Soviet Union. He had, up till then, served as a volunteer with the Swedish Volunteer Company in Finland, but wanted to continue fighting. It is highly plausible that **Posse** was not politically motivated; hatred of the Soviet Union and Communist ideology appears to have been his primary motivation.[87] While in Norway he socialized with Swedish nationals serving in the *SD.* One of

83 Report Thursday 13 February 1947. H.A. 244/47. (RA)
84 Act: 50:6 / 4 A Volume two. Nazism; 'Swedish Nazi parties and abroad. Germany. *Waffen-SS* other German military service'. P.M. concerning Swedish volunteers in the *Waffen-SS* from Olso police dated 22.6.46 – 29.6.46. (RA)
85 Ibid.
86 Report Wednesday 4 April 1945. (RA)
87 P.M. concerning Knut POSSE, b. 1926 and service in Finland and Germany 1943-45. 09.12.86. (Author's archive)

them, **Carl-Göran Edquist,** attempted dissuade him from enlisting in the *SS* or at least joining the *SD* which would enable him to remain in Norway. **Edquist** explained that the war was lost for Germany – an opinion which angered **Posse,** who explained that his sole wish was to become a German front line officer.[88]

However, in early 1945 the situation for the Swedes at Graz changed because of orders from the Berlin-based ***SS Untersturmführer* Gunnar Eklöf**. This was in connection with the final attempt to create a Swedish *SS* unit tasked with sabotage behind the enemy lines.

Eklöf, previously wounded whilst serving as platoon leader, spent his convalescence working at the *Schwedische Verbindungstelle* (Swedish liaison office). Tasked with the new assignment 19 December 1944, he took on the role of company commander within the newly-formed *Jagdverband 'Nordwest'*.[89] The *Jagdverbände* was commanded by legendary ***SS-Standartenführer* Otto Skorzeny**, who had participated in freeing **Mussolini** from mountain imprisonment in 1943. *Jagdverband "Nordwest',* created in late 1944, was to consist of four regular companies and four foreign volunteer companies.[90] The reader should note, that the *Jagdverbände* was in fact not a part of the *Waffen-SS,* but the *Reich Security Main Office (RSHA)*. While the other Swedes within the *RSHA* are featured in the chapter about *Swedish non-combatants,* the *Jagdverband* will be featured here because of close ties with the *Waffen-SS*.

Another man who might have served directly under **Otto Skorzeny** was **Carl-Göran Edquist** who met **Posse** in Norway. He related an amazing story about his subsequent *SS* service which, all things considered, is rather hard to believe. The story is, nevertheless, a compelling one, most of the details related during interrogation correspond with actual facts. I beg the reader to take note of the footnote below since there is some controversy regarding this story.[91]

In January 1945, following the end of his assignment with *Sonderkommando Nord*, **Edquist** was transferred to Schloss Friedenthal close to Sachsenhausen to serve at **Otto Skorzeny's** headquarters. His main assignment was to create a report concerning how to improve the relation between German occupation forces and the populations of Denmark and Norway. This resulted in a 150-page report which he submitted on 25 January 1945. The high regard and trust in which he was held by **Skorzeny** and other high ranking officers, allowed him to move about freely, but at the beginning of February he was ordered to report to Berlin from where he was only permitted to visit Schloss Friedenthal twice a week to pick up ration cards and enquire after new assignments.[92]

Eklöf, in order to establish the company, dispatched an order to Graz requiring all Swedish nationals to report to Berlin. The fact that they would be required to join the new unit was not related. He claimed instead that that the new arrivals were going to assist in the creation of a Swedish volunteer index. Six of the total nine Swedes who were at the camp arrived in Berlin on 30 January 1945. Those (**Posse, Ridderstedt** and **Bernhardsson-Pettersson**) who remained had fallen ill and were placed in the infirmary.

Eklöf, following the arrival of the non-plussed recruits at his office, distributed Swedish flag insignia and explained that they would in fact serve in a special Eastern Front sabotage unit.[93] This

88 Interrogation of Carl-Göran Edquist. 25.9.45. (RA)

89 *SS*-Personal file for Gunnar Eklöf. (NARA/BDC)

90 For additional information concerning the Jagdverband see Antonio J. Munoz, *Forgotten Legions: Obscure Combat Formations of the Waffen-SS*, 1991.

91 Interrogation of Carl-Göran Edquist. 25.9.45. (RA)

92 Ibid.

93 Members of Eklöfs *Jagdverband* later claimed that they were issued Swedish shields to wear on tunic sleeves, despite no such insignia being officially distributed by the *SS*. This information, if correct, is likely evidence that Eklöf had the badges manufactured on his own initiative.

in combination with the dolorous situation on other fronts resulted in immediate applications to return home and requested transfers to *Schijäger-Btl.* in Norway. Three had their applications approved and left Berlin 22 February. **Eklöf** was arrested for the murder of the **Obersturmführer Sven Rydén**a few days later. The remaining volunteers managed to obtain counterfeit Norway transfer documents with the help of a sympathetic Norwegian volunteer. They departed from war-torn Berlin at the beginning of March 1945.[94]

Edquist was simultaneously visited by a man from the *Gestapo*. The pair got drunk and, while intoxicated, the latter informed the former that he was suspected of committing various offenses amongst which were insulting the *Führer*, stealing a *Panzerfaust* and loud revelations of military secrets. Thoroughly frightened, the hapless Swede slipped his drinking partner some sleeping pills after which he drowned the unconscious man in the nearby Wannsee.[95] Nevertheless, he was arrested and brought to the *Gestapo* headquarters at Prinz Albrect Strasse for interrogation on 8 March.[96]

Löfgren returned to Graz around the same time. Captured in uniform by a German *Feldpolizei* unit whilst recovering at a partisan hospital, his deserter status was already known. Interrogated and tortured, he claimed to have been captured and forced to throw in his lot with the partisans. This story was challenged by two Danish volunteers taken prisoner shortly before him. Sentenced to death, he joined other volunteers awaiting the same fate, some of whom he was forced to kiss.[97]

The three volunteers (**Posse, Bernhardsson-Pettersson** and **Lofthammar)** remaining at Graz recovered at the infirmary at the same time. **Bernhardsson-Pettersson**, however, managed to desert and made it to Berlin. There he found employment as a driver for the Swedish church. Vanishing not long afterwards, several years passed before it was discovered that he had, in all likelihood, been killed by a strafing Allied aircraft.

The exact fate of **Posse** and **Lofthammar** is not entirely clear. On the 30 March 1945, *SS-Pz-Gren-Ausb-u.-Ers-Btl. 11* received orders to form an alarm unit to engage the Red Army at Rechnitz on the Hungarian frontier. Formed into an ad hoc *Kampfgruppe* under **SS- Sturmbannführer Willi Schweitzer**, their mission to recapture Rechnitz and occupy the nearby *Reichschutzestellung***.** Consisting of six companies (approximately 800 men), compromised of the staff and the entire training camp (recovering wounded and raw recruits) complement, they lacked heavy weapons. Available fire support was dependent on a few mortars and *Panzerfausts*.

The poorly equipped unit moved out in trucks appropriated from the postal service that day. The *Kampfgruppe*, despite lack of heavy equipment and inexperienced personal, managed to retake Rechnitz by assaulting the city's north-west heights on 1 April. Heavy losses were sustained whilst doing so. *Kampfgruppe Schweitzer* suffered futher heavy losses during the next ten days. Of the original 800 men, approximately 600 were either killed, wounded or missing. The battered remains returned to Graz on the 11th. Amongst the missing were **Posse** and **Lofthammar.** Their exact fate has never been established, but they were likely killed during the fighting around Rechnitz. The family, **Posse's** cousin recollected, eventually recognised he would not be returning home. Contacting the Red Cross, a subsequent report revealed that all enquiries had been to no avail. They did, however, hear rumours of imprisonment at a Soviet labour camp.[98]

Löfgren remained on death row until 3 May 1945. That night he was brought out with 14 other inmates to be executed by firing squad. The group was ordered to dig a mass grave, but in

94 Report Wednesday 4 April 1945. (RA)
95 Interrogation of Carl-Göran Edquist. 25.9.45. (RA).
96 Ibid.
97 Report Thursday 13 February 1947. H.A. 244/47. (RA)
98 Letter from Knut Posse's cousin, 01.02.87. (Author's archive)

Swedish count Knut Posse in Finnish uniform with "Hanko Clasp" volunteer badge above the left pocket. (Göran Hargestam)

the dim light he managed to escape. Making his way to a private air raid shelter, he hid until the next morning. The owner, on discovery, called for the *Feldpolizei* who, in the expectation that the war was over, set him free. Captured by the Allies and brought to an English hospital, he had his injuries taken care of before transfer to an American prison camp in Italy. Released after 14 days, he lacked identification papers, so was arrested again and, during the routine body search, they noticed his blood group tattoo. Sentenced to 8 months hard labour, he managed to return home in October 1946. **Jansson's** immediate fate remains uncertain, although it is clear he returned to Sweden.[99]

The volunteers who managed to make their way to Norway from Berlin returned home in late March 1945. Several would be tried and sentenced for espionage.[100]

Edquist remained a prisoner until the end of the war. Transported with other prominent prisoners to Flossenberg concentration camp in April 1945, he witnessed round the clock executions over a period of several days. Transported to Dachau not long afterwards, he was imprisoned with former Greek supreme commander **Papagos**, former Reich Economy Minister **Hjalmar Schacht** and General **Franz Halder**, Additional prominent prisoners – including the widows of participants in the failed 20 July 1944 plot to kill **Hitler** – were relocated there not long afterwards.[101]

99 Report Thursday 13 February 1947. H.A. 244/47. (RA)
100 Report Wednesday 4 April 1945. (RA)
101 Interrogation of Carl-Göran Edquist. 25.9.45. (RA)

Surviving prisoners were moved to a small concentration camp near Innsbruck in April 1945. From there they marched towards Italy via the Brenner Pass before halting at Niederdorf.

While there, one of the captured Generals managed to establish contact with an active German General, who assigned a *Wehrmacht* company to protect the prisoners from their guards. Partisans managed to capture the town a few days later, and on 5 May the first US troops arrived. The liberated prisoners were transported to the island of Capri for interrogation. They found, in possession of one of the *SS* guards, an order from Himmler that stated the prisoners were to be executed in the event of capture. Edquist had escaped death by a hair's breadth.[102]

102 Edquist's story, despite its rather questionable veracity and convenient guilt-free inference can is eminently verifiable. Service within *Sonderkommando 'Nord'* and the secret plan to create a Finnish resistance commission with ties to Sweden, he later observed, would have had the right people serving at the right places His story also corresponds with what is known about the Operation. Concerning his connection to Otto Skorzeny, he correctly identified the location of the former's headquarters and the various staff officers serving there, their assignments, details of the *Jagdverbände* organisation and other operations. During his time as a prisoner, at both prisons and concentration camps he correctly identified 20 prisoners who shared his captivity. Details concerning the service of *SS* officers with the correct times and places in connection with this period. Thus this tale, as related to the Swedish police in September of 1945, appears to be entirely factual.

10

Swedish Non-combatants in *SS* Service

A number of Swedes, in addition to those serving in the *Waffen SS* served in a civilian capacity. Indeed, the *SS* was vast organisation that had grown in leaps and bounds beyond its *Schützstaffel* or 'protection squad' antecedents to approximately 178 sub-organisations. In 1929 the *SS* consisted of a mere 290 members. The appointment of Heinrich Himmler that very same year was the start of an impressive expansion to 290,000 members within four years. Although the main topic of this work concerns Swedish volunteers in the *Waffen SS*, an examination of the civilian employee element is also of interest in order to understand the totality of Swedish experience within the *SS* state.

Swedes at the *SS-Hauptamt*

The *SS-Hauptamt*, or main office, had origins ranging back to 1931 when the *SS-Amt* was established in order to act as an oversight staff of the *Allgemeine SS.* It was, following the *NSDAP's* accession to power in 1933, in charge of all the *SS* units. Re-designated *SS Oberführerbereichen* in 1935, the office became officially known as the *SS-Hauptamt* and was now under control of the *SS Verfügungstruppen* – subsequently known as the *Waffen-SS – Allgemeine-SS* and concentration camp personnel within the *SS Totenkopfverbände*. The organisation grew further until 1940, when the majority of the power was subsumed by the *SS Führungshauptamt*. During the war, the *SS-Hauptamt* was managed by ***SS-Obergruppenführer*** **Gottlob Berger** who, among his other assignments, was in charge of foreign volunteer recruitment. This was handled by a sub-department, the *Germanische Leitstelle*.

Despite the fact that there never was any real recruitment drive for Swedish volunteers, several came forward to serve with the *SS Hauptamt*. In 1941, just prior to 'Operation Barbarossa', two Swedish nationals – later to serve in the *Hauptamt* – met in Norway. **Olof Sandström,** a National Socialist born in 1914 had been a member of the *SNSP* prior to joining the *SNF* in 1934. A year later he switched over to the *NSAP,* but resigned when the party changed direction and became the *SSS* in 1938. Following this, he tried to join the extremist *Sun Wheel* organisation, but was denied membership for unknown reasons.[1] The second volunteer was **Gustaf Ekström** (b.1907) who likewise had been active in the National Socialist movement, but commenced his somewhat checkered political career as a member of *Sweden's Fascist Struggle Organization* in 1926. Taking up studies in the USA not long afterward, he joined the *SNSP* following his return home in 1932. Changing over to the *NSAP* in 1933. Four years later he had risen to 'Block leader' within the

1 Police folder summary P.4151,16.8.45. P4151. (RA)

A group of Swedish *SA*-members 1935. Gustaf Ekström is on the far right of the lower row. (Bosse B. archive)

party and, sometime afterwards, to *SA*-group leader in the town of Örebro. Financial gain was also obtained by the shares he held in the *NS* press, the party printing house.[2]

Sandström, having returned from the Finnish Winter War in 1940, had a difficult time finding a civilian employment. This was why he visited Stockholm's German legation to enquire about possible vacancies in the Reich. Made no promises, he was told there were employment possibilities in occupied Norway. Thus **Sandström** legally left Sweden in April 1941 to try his luck.[3] **Ekström** had a similar story. His political background prevented him from obtaining employment following military service. This was why he applied for permission to attend a university in Germany. His application was approved and he legally departed in early May 1941.[4] Both were unable to find work in occupied Norway, but were offered the opportunity to join the *SS* which they agreed to one week after **Ekström's** departure. They were joined by volunteers **Stig Cederholm** and **Liljekvist** (whose first name is uncertain) for the long journey to Sennheim, where they would participate in basic training.[5] **Cederholm** would later claim to have served on the Ukrainian front, although this is highly unlikely. He was an escaped mental patient who, according to another

2 Political participation list, Gustaf Ekström. HA 909/45. (RA)
3 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45 P4151. (RA)
4 P.M. concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Hilding Gustav Sigurd Ekström, born 9/10 1907 and last residence at the address Kungsgatan 10, Linde Borg. 28.5.43. HA 909/45. (RA)
5 Memorandum on Wednesday, 9 May 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

volunteer, spent his entire war service driving a lorry. Returning to Sweden he achieved some fame as the creator of the popular comic strip *Åsa-Nisse*, which has since been the subject of a number of feature films, the latest released in 2011.

While **Sandström** would spend the initial stages of his service as a medic at different training camps and as a *SS-Kriegsberichter* with the NCO-rank of *SS Oberscharführer*, **Ekström** was instead transferred to the *SS-Hauptamt* in Berlin on 1 September 1941.[6] His service there consisted of translating Swedish news paper articles about Germany in general and the National Socialism in particular to give the German authorities some insight in how the Swedish general public responded towards Germany. As he applied to fight against the Red Army he was flown to Finland on 1 November 1941, where he would remain until March 1942 when he returned to Berlin. He was then promoted to *SS-Rottenführer*, awarded the Eastern Front medal and returned to his duties as interpreter at the *SS-Hauptamt*.[7]

Hans Lindström was another Swede who enlisted at the same time. He would later serve with *Germanische Leitstelle* and *amt VI* of the *SS-Hauptamt*. Possessing a dual citizenship, he spent most of his youth in Germany where he had also been a member of the *Hitler Jugend*. He later claimed his main motivation to enlist was primarily based on the fact that he had spent his early years as a youth in Germany.[8] Serving in Finland as a volunteer during 1941, he requested a discharge in October that same year. The request denied, he was instead granted home leave, after which he deserted and proceeded to Norway and enlistment in the *SS*.[9] Undergoing the standard medical examinations, he was found fit for service and sent to Sennheim via Denmark and Germany. Following training at Klagenfurt camp, he was assigned to the *Germanische Leitstelle* sometime in early 1942.[10] There **Lindström** was tasked with preparation of material for political education, but later claimed his service had not been onerous, as he was most of the time on leave during which he worked at the family-owned paper mill.[11]

The number of Swedish desk clerks at the Berlin office increased during 1942. That May, ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Sven Rydén** was transferred to the *Germanische Leitstelle*. Enlisting in the *SS* in August 1941, he was a fugitive from Swedish military justice following arrest for drunkenness. Escape to Germany appears to have been a natural choice as he was a convinced National Socialist who had been in previous contact with the German Consulate prior to enlistment. Considered too old for front line service, he was posted to Berlin after undergoing training at an anti-aircraft training unit. **Rydén** received his promotion to *SS-Obersturmführer* in October 1941. This was probably based on experience which he claimed to have gained during previous Finnish service. There is, however, no evidence he actually fought there and several volunteers felt that he deceived his new employers into granting higher rank than he was actually entitled to.[12] This, in combination with his general behaviour, placed him in a bad light amongst fellow volunteers.[13]

Rydén ended up serving the Estonian recruitment department and would conduct several trips to recruit Estonian-Swedes. At some point, he was also assigned with the mission to create a Swedish volunteer battalion by ***Reichsführer-SS*** **Heinrich Himmler**. To complete this task he

6 Ibid and Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)
7 Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)
8 Compilation to case XII 83/Ä 2237. (RA)
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Interrogation of Richard Franz Johannes Hans Lindström. 20.12.45. XII 83/Ä 2237. (RA)
12 *SS* Stammkarte, Sven Rydén. (NARA)
13 Telegram from Thorolf Hillblad to Erik Rundkvist, 2000. (Author's archive)

SS-Oberscharführer Olof Sandström. (Author's archive)

approached a volunteer enrolled in officers' training at Bad Tölz for his assistance about identifying and enlisting the prerequisite numbers. Having previously written to the leader (**Sven-Olof Lindholm**) of the *SSS* party and urged him to forward member lists to Berlin. Neither appear to have replied to his enquires.[14]

Gustaf Ekström visited Norway during a period of leave in May 1942. During that time he applied for a new passport. Eligible to receive a provisional document only, he feared that he would be prosecuted if he returned to Sweden why he decided to forgo further enquiries.[15] Remaining in Norway where he was assigned to the Oslo recruiting office within *SS-Ersatzkommando 'Norwegen'*, he kept busy with registration and clerical work.[16] Meanwhile in Berlin, **Sandström** was released from his *Waffen-SS* contract in November 1942. He would, however, remain with the *SS-Hauptamt*.[17] Assigned once more as assignment as an interpreter, **Sandström** was attached to the *Germanische Leitstelle* as a volunteer liaison while also working, in a civilian capacity, in a store.[18]

14 Interrogation of Jakob Yngve Hellenborg. 5.4.43. P3117 (RA) and Letter to Sven-Olof Lindholm from *SS*-Ostuf. Sven Rydén. *SS*-Hauptamt, 9.7.42. (NARA)

15 Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

16 Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

17 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)

18 Ibid and Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9, 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

Kurt-Birger Norberg. (Author's archive)

Rydén and **Ekström** would be joined by **Kurt-Birger Norberg,** who crossed the Norwegian border in November 1942.[19] He was, like **Rydén**, promoted to *Obersturmführer* based on previous Finnish service. There was, however, a difference inasmuch that **Norberg** actually served there. Another thing they had in common was the animosity of a number of volunteers. A compulsive liar who related questionable information to the Swedish, he would be convicted for fraud seven times during his lifetime.[20] **Norberg** served with the *Germanische Leitstelle,* where he claimed to have been tasked with organising Norwegian police and volunteer companies. This story, however, appears to be spurious given that fact that these units have not been identified by researchers.[21]

Granted home leave in December 1942, **Olof Sandström** visited **Friedrich Stengel** at Stockholm's German Legation where the latter asked him to keep an eye on the Swedish volunteers and report any misconduct to him. He also asked if he would be able to provide information about the size and organisation of the various Swedish National Socialist parties. The latter task was something **Sandström** had little knowledge about but, in regard to the previous query, he could only report the misbehaviour of two (**Stig Cederholm** who **Sandström** previously underwent the training with in 1941 and **Yngve Hellenborg**, who participated in the officer training at Bad Tölz) volunteers.[22] The same month **Norberg** fell ill after only one month of service. Suffering from pleurisy, his malady was probably a result of bad weather encountered whilst crossing the Norwegian border.[23] He later claimed, following recovery in January 1943, to have paid a visit to the Swedish military attaché in Berlin, partly to supply information of interest and to receive discharge assistance based on a growing disillusionment with National Socialism. He also claimed that his visit,

19 Newspaper article in Norberg's police folder: "Reservlöjtnant rymde till tysk militärtjänst". P3796. (RA)
20 Report: Tuesday, 23 March 1943 concerning Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)
21 Phone conversation between author and Norwegian researcher Geir Brenden, 2011.
22 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)
23 Report: Tuesday, 23 March 1943 concerning Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

after becoming known to German authorities, was followed by transfer to the Eastern Front where he saw action with the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*.[24] His front-line service is unconfirmed and no mention of it can be found in his *Soldbuch*. **Norberg** terminated his service by deserting to Sweden in March 1943. The considerable amount information he supplied to the Swedish authorities makes it clear that he had a widespread knowledge of the holocaust:

> The persecution of the Jews has increased since Hitler proclaimed they should be completely exterminated. All Jews are shot behind the Russian front. In Germany, those who are unfit for work are executed, whilst men and women capable of working are strictly separated and transported as labourers to the eastern areas.
>
> In February, there was a large cleansing in Berlin. According to N. there are approximately 300 remaining Jews who are in the service of the Berlin *Gestapo*. The *Waffen-SS* never participate in the executions, which are carried out by special departments of the *Allgemeine-SS*.[25]

This information, although not entirely correct, it is an interesting example of what was known about the Holocaust at the time.

Two volunteer employees left the *SS-Hauptamt* in February 1943. **Gustaf Ekström**, who was about to be promoted to *SS-Unterscharführer,* was granted a discharge following confirmation of acceptance at the University in Nürnberg.[26] **Hans Lindström** was transferred from the *Germanische Leitstelle* to Holland. Unfortunately no further details of his service are known.[27] Claims to have returned to civilian life after a four-week period were subsequently challenged by a comrade who recollected ***SS-Unterscharführer* Lindström** acting as an instructor at Sennheim in April 1943.[28] The tale seems highly unlikely, although he never confirmed nor denied it himself.

During spring and summer 1943 **Sandström** carried on with his missions in Berlin while also finding second employment. Encountering **Thorolf Hillblad,** who managed the local *SSS* party office, he was employed as 'country secretary'. Amongst his duties was to recruit Swedish volunteers stationed at various training camps into the *SSS* party if not already members.[29] That spring volunteer **Bengt Hassler** appears to have commenced his service with the *SS-Hauptamt*. A prominent member of the *SSS* party, he was also a decorated army officer with previous Finnish service. Accused of illegal recruiting for the *SS*, the subsequent thoroughly investigation failed to produce any evidence of guilt.[30]

Because of this, **Hassler** was classified as 'A' category or "dangerous Nazi and/or key party member" by Swedish authorities. Discharged from the Swedish army because of this, he instead went to work full-time for the party. His absence from the front, however, did not last long, the former soldier applying for Finnish service for the third time. The chief of the volunteer agency, **Nils Palmé,** knowing **Hassler** by reputation, decided to consult his former Hanko Front commander for a statement regarding suitability. The latter considered the highly-decorated **Hassler** to be a

24 Ibid.

25 P.M. concerning information concerning German conditions by the former Second Lieutenant of intendenturkårens reserve Kurt Birger Norberg. P3796. (RA)

26 Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9, 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

27 Interrogation of Richard Franz Johannes Hans Lindström. 20.12.45.XII 83/Ä 223. (RA)

28 XII 83/Ä.2237, Hans Lindström. 'Rank: *Unterscharführer*. Assignment: instructor at Sennheim'. 31.12.43. XII 83/Ä 2237. (RA)

29 Interrogation with Olof Sandström. 6.7.45 P4151. (RA)

30 Case Hd. 768/42 (RA) Short summary to P.3285. (RA)

very capable officer and tendered no objections.[31] The applicant's Swedish military service now terminated, **Palmé** felt rather sorry for the discredited **Hassler** and, believing it would be beneficial for him to get away from the political scene, accepted him for military service abroad. Following a ceremony at the *SSS* Stockholm headquarters, **Hassler** departed for Finland on 12 March 1943.[32] His arrival there was followed by clamours in the Swedish left wing press of the "Nazification" of the Sweden's Finnish front volunteers. The furore led to the realization that **Hassler's** presence would not ameliorate this picture. This resulted in an agreement – subsequently reached with the Finnish military authorities – that **Hassler** would not be permitted to serve in the Swedish volunteer company; he would instead be transferred him to a Finnish Regular army unit.[33] **Hassler**, unhappy with this decision, left Finland for Germany in April.[34] Selected to participate in the officer training at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz*, he graduated in October 1943.[35]

The *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* was formed in autumn 1943. This was accompanied by the attempt to channel all Swedish volunteers to the *'Nordland' Division*. **Olof Sandström**, having received a well-paid employment at Königsberg radio, resigned his position as *SS-Hauptamt* liaison. Also employed by the Swedish authorities during this period, he acted as interpreter for Swedish sailors facing trial on behalf of the Swedish consulate.[36] The liaison position would soon be filled ***SS-Untersturmführer* Gunnar Eklöf**, who had been assigned to *General Kommando III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* the following November.

In October **Sven Rydén** was sent back to Berlin after serving as an instructor at Sennheim camp whilst **Bengt Hassler** finished the course at from Bad Tölz with the rank of *SS-Obersturmführer* and was assigned to the *SS-Hauptamt,* with a note that he would later be transferred to the *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps* as company commander.[37] However, the former prominent member of the *SSS* party, had by now lost interest in National Socialism and its cause. Talk of subsuming Sweden into a post-war Germanic state during officer training was a view **Hassler** could not support. Consequent alienation and disillusionment is understandable when considers that he considered himself a Swedish officer and nothing else.[38] It was during his stay in Berlin that visited *SD* headquarters. There he saw a map of Sweden, with several pins placed on it – even if not informed of their exact meaning, he drew his own conclusions.[39] Some believe, based on these contacts that **Hassler** was employed by the SD. **Norberg** subsequently related that he was a candidate for the *Gestapo*. I have been unable to confirm this, but it according to German documents, it is clear that he was to become a *Waffen-SS* company commander which should exclude such service.

Mistrustful and disillusioned**, Hassler** applied for resignation shortly after leaving *Bad Tölz*. Following this, he worked – in **Thorolf Hillblad's** absence – as manager for the local *SSS* party office whilst awaiting approval. Bugged telephone conversation transcripts reveal that he made no attempt to hide his intentions to return home, and in a conversation on the 19 December

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid and Service record from SFK, Bengt Hassler. (KrA)
35 P.M. to case P.3285. (RA)
36 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)
37 Document about graduates from 2. Kriegsjunkerlehrgang für Germanisches Offiziere, Bad Tölz. (NARA/BDC)
38 P.M. to case P.3285. (RA)
39 P.M. to case P.3285. (RA)

SS-Obersturmführer Bengt Hassler. (Author's archive)

he informed a party colleague his resignation had finally been approved.[40] Back home on 24 December 1943, he resigned all *SSS* party responsibilities. Officially thanked for his services, **Sven-Olof Lindholm** was unhappy with the decision noting that **Hassler's** reasons were "known to us all".[41] The latter, concerned about state security, promised to inform the authorities of any potential threats from within the party. He also made it clear that he would in no way slander his former colleagues.[42]

In April 1944, **Olof Sandström** left his position at Königsberg radio and spent the summer in the city as a civilian before returning to Sweden during the fall.[43] Once again, it appears as if the Swedish liaison office was left unattended for a several weeks, as ***SS-Untersturmführer*** **Gunnar Eklöf** was serving at the front during May-July 1944 until wounded. He resumed office responsibilities shortly after recovery. **Hans Lindström** more than likely returned to *Germanische Leitstelle* following his time at Sennheim camp, but in August 1944 was posted to another school; this time as a student at *Junkerschule Bad Tölz*. While there he earned the respect of the other students by sporting the Finnish Freedom Cross first and second class on his tunic. How or when he – a former sergeant – acquired them remains unknown, but what is clear is that could not have earned the decorations during his service in 1941. The Freedom Cross was awarded to officers who at least

40 Abstract from bugged phone conversation between Hassler (Berlin) and Mr. X – *SSS* (Stockholm). 19.12.43. Hd. 768/42. (RA)

41 Abstract from bugged phone conversation between Lindholm (Stockholm) and Mr. X (Stockholm) 4.1.44. Hd. 768/42. (RA) and newspaper article "message from the party staff"- *Den Svenske Folksocialisten*. Hd. 768/42. (RA)

42 P.M. to case P.3285. (RA)

43 Summary of police folder P.4151, 16.8.45. (RA)

held the rank of captain; the first class to officers who at least held the rank of Colonel! It is said, following the Finnish cease-fire in September 1944, that **Lindström** was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class and First Class in exchange for removing the now discredited foreign awards.

Sandström was sent to Stockholm in the beginning of October where, according to himself, he carried out a mission on behalf of the *SS-Hauptamt*. The assignment concerned the search for a suitable National Socialist willing to support the German legation in recruiting Swedish and Finnish nationals for the *Waffen-SS*. The legation staff subsequently denied this by stating that the *SS-Hauptamt* had contacted them to discuss arrangements to recruit refugee Finnish officers. Consular officials tried to explain the mission was a waste of time and resources inasmuch as the majority of refugees were old men, women and children. Thus they were quite surprised that **Sandström** had been despatched to assist them. **Sandström,** nevertheless, also claimed to have put them in contact with someone suitable and then, on 21 October 1944, returned to Berlin where he once again took up liaison duties under ***SS-Untersturmführer* Gunnar Eklöf.**[44] The veracity of this information is therefore rather difficult to confirm, but volunteer, **Nils Bertil Forsman,** who was under investigation for illegal recruitment violations, later claimed he was approached by the consulate for the same reason in October 1944. **Forsman**, a volunteer from the summer 1942 to spring 1943, served with the rank of *SS-Hauptscharführer*. He appears, however, to have been employed as an instructor despite previous service in Finland. Service at the front had a profound effect on his ability to cope. Thus, as related in a 1943 correspondence, he would never return, his nerves being worn out. Back home in Sweden with broken morale, he was charged for drunkenness, assault, disorderly conduct and weapons possession charges.

1945: Bureaucratic Endgame

Swedish nationals were, as the war drew close in 1945, still occupied with the Berlin bureaucracy. **Rydén**, having applied for discharge in September 1944, was still in the capitol awaiting approval. **Gunnar Eklöf** and **Olof Sandström** were working at the *Schwedische Verbindungstelle*, the first of the two having also been appointed as company commander with *Jagdverband 'Nordwest'*. During the following February, a number of Swedes would leave their positions. **Sven Rydén** was found beaten to death with a blunt object in Berlin on 19 February 1945. Suspicions soon fell on **Eklöf**, as his animosity to **Rydén** was well known. The prime suspect was shortly thereafter arrested and imprisoned. Never convicted, many of his comrades still considered him as guilty.

It was clear that the enemy would reach the gates of Berlin by early April 1945. **Olof Sandström**, concerned about the fate of the volunteers, visited the *SS-Hauptamt* to state, he subsequently told the Swedish police during interrogations, that the final phase of the war was a German matter and Swedes sought to be released from their contacts as "central Europe would crumble in the struggle against the Soviet Union". Asking for permission to correspond with units having volunteers on their roster in order to obtain release, he hoped to gain permission for them to travel to Berlin where he would arrange discharges and travel home. His superiors disagreed, considering the volunteers were fighting for a "great Germanic idea", and declared they lacked the means of transportation for such an arrangement. Asked to return the following day, **Sandström** found that their opinion had changed by then. The necessary permission was granted and promises made to halt the progress of volunteers who had recently had crossed into Norway. Time was of the essence and, in a desperate attempt to make contact, he started posting letters. The only positive response, confirmation that any volunteers in Norway would be detained, was received on 21 April. At the same time, *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11 'Nordland'* retreated towards Berlin with several

44 Interrogation of Johannes Metzger, press attaché at the German Consulate in Stockholm. 25.10.45. P4151. (RA)

Swedish volunteers serving in its ranks. The move was not, for the attached volunteers, to obtain discharges, but rather to participate in the final hopeless battle to save the city.

Only two Swedes, albeit by their own initiative, presented themselves to arrange discharge: war correspondent **Carl Svensson** and **Gustaf Ekström** who, having participated in the basic training with **Sandström** in 1941, was employed by the *SS-Hauptamt* until 1943. The *SS-Hauptamt* having

Sven Rydén. (Martin Månsson)

Hans Lindström (dressed in black panzer uniform, lower row) with his classmates at Bad Tölz. (Bosse B. archive)

left the capitol during April 1945, **Sandström** considered his mission over and made his own attempt to return home. However, the front-line having reached the city outskirts, he was forced to turn back and experience the fighting as a civilian.[45]

Eklöf returned to Berlin during the final days of April 1945. Released from the prison where he had been detained for murder, he, having no interest in serving as a combatant, sought refuge in a Swedish church. This is ironic when one considers his repeated accusations of comrades for cowardice.

Hans Lindström graduated from the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* in February 1945. Granted leave, a subsequent order to appear in Leipzig decided him to seek a path home. Travelling via Flensburg he arrived in Copenhagen, from where he continued with the help of the Swedish Embassy.[46]

Allgemeine-SS

The *Allgemeine-SS*, or 'General *SS*' was established in 1934. Organised as the civil arm of the *SS*, it was set up to distinguish members who were not part of the *Verfügungstruppe* or concentration camp units and the *SS-Totenkopfverbände*. *Allgemeine-SS* members were mostly part-time held civilian employment outside the organisation. For example, it was during the pre-war years that both (*Gestapo* and *SD*) were considered part of *Allgemeine-SS*, prior to becoming a separate sub-department of the *SS-Reichsicherungshauptamt – RSHA* in 1939. As the war progressed, the *A-SS* lost power, influence and manpower. A number of its previous sub-departments became autonomous parts of the *SS* instead. At least three Swedes belonged to the *A-SS* during the pre-war years, though very little is known about their service. In 1935 **Gunnar Bergqvist** joined the *Allgemeine-SS*, serving within the *SS-Oberabschnitt 'Süd'*. Born in 1898, he immigrated to Germany in 1912.[47] Interestingly enough, he is the sole confirmed *SS* volunteer who also fought in the First World War, during which he served with an artillery unit and was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class.[48] Returning to Sweden for military service, he also received the appointment as the Swedish deputy military attaché in Berlin. **Bergqvist** was from a political active family, one of his relatives having been a member of parliament and founder of the Swedish racial biology institute. A cousin would also serve as a Swedish military attaché in Berlin during 1939-45 and was involved in helping several *SS* volunteers with discharge applications.

In the beginning of the 1930's **Bergqvist** settled in the small German village of Bad-Wörishofen where he managed a sanatorium. Joing the the *SA* (*Sturmabteilung*) in 1932, he resigned to join the *Allgemeine SS* in 1935. Wartime service with the *SD (Sicherheitsdienst)*, security service, while also remaining in the *Allgemeine-SS*, followed. Rising to the rank of *Hauptsturmführer* by 1943,[49] he returned home after four months of Allied imprisonment in 1945.[50]

Information concerning the other Swedish volunteers in *Allgemeine-SS* service is sparse. Known to have served within the *SS* sub-organisation was **Hans-Caspar Krueger** during 1941-42 (who later served in the *'Wiking' Division* and *SS-Standarte "Kurt Eggers"),* **Olaf Jürgenssen**, during

45 Report of events associated with Berlin's defensive battles, surrender and own return journey to Sweden. 23.7.45. P4151. (RA)

46 Interrogation with Richard Franz Johannes Hans Lindström. 20.12.45. XII 83/Ä 2237. (RA)

47 Swedish passport application. (Arkiv BS/TH. RA)

48 Ibid.

49 *SS*-Stammkarte, Gunnar Bergqvist (NARA/BDC) and letter from Gunnar Bergqvist to "Lieber Günther". Bad Wörishofen, 5/2 1940. (NARA/BDC)

50 Ergänzung zur liste der Transportteilnehmer vom 24. Oktober 1945. (Arkiv BS/TH. RA)

1935-40 (who subsequently served as a *Waffen-SS* doctor) and **Lars Blom,** who ended up in the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*.[51]

Occupied countries had their own *Allgemeine-SS* equivalents. Two volunteers (**Gösta Stawåsen** and **Thure Carlsson**) served in *'Germanske SS Norwegen'*. The Danish equivalent was '*Schalburgkorpset'* in which a single Swede (**Severin Gunnar Enfrid Svensson)** is known to have served**.** Recruited in 1944, he deserted after only a month. Sentenced to two years hard labour in Denmark for high treason after the war, revelation of his nationality was followed by release and indemnity.[52]

Swedish Agents and Security Service Personnel in Occupied Norway

In addition to the combat formations and administrative subdivisions of the *SS*, the organization was also in charge of the Reich security ministry. Prior to 1939, the security police had been organized under the *'Hauptamt Sicherheitspolizei* consisting of *Gestapo* (secret state police) and *KriPo* (Criminal Police). Together, these two organizations were known as the *SiPo* or security police. With the establishment of the *Reich Security main office* (*RSHA*) in 1939, the Third Reich created a large-scale governing body for the security sub-departments. To this was added the *SD* (*Sicherheitsdienst* or security service). Established in 1931 as the security and intelligence organ of the *NSDAP*-party, its goal was to create an effective organization to battle the Reich's enemies within and outside the state. The *Abwehr,* subsumed to the *Wehrmacht,* was tasked with gathering foreign military intelligence, however, the *SD* also worked to gather similar information even if beyond the realm of responsibility. Despite this, the *RSHA* never developed into an effective organization due to financial cuts and transfers of personnel to the front during the war.

The responsibility of the organizations within the occupied countries increased and it was these departments which would terrorize the civil population while hunting down political enemies and resistance members. In the east, the *Einsatzgruppen,* previously subsumed by the *RSHA,* was responsible for the mass-murder of Jews and other undesirables.

While it is true that no known Swedes participated in the *Einsatzgruppen's* many war crimes, a number were employed by the *SD, Gestapo, SiPo* and *Abwehr*; in most cases in German-occupied Norway. The country, under occupation since April 1940, had a large resistance movement. Its border with Sweden was also an ideal invasion jump-off point for an invasion and thus of great intelligence value in regard to Swedish border defenses. Swedish volunteers were therefore of interest for two reasons: provision of intelligence concerning resistance movements; Swedish nationals could infiltrate these organizations as they were conversant with the language and culturally related. They were also able to provide valuable information concerning the Swedish military.

In total, around 25 Swedish citizens served in the *SD* and *SiPo;* an additional 19 within the *Abwehr,* but as the main subject of this book are Swedes serving in the *Waffen-SS*, what follows is a short introduction to the subject.[53]

The most prominent Swedish *SiPo*-agent in Norway was without doubt **Thorvald Calais**, who fled from Sweden in April 1942. The exact reason for his flight remains unclear, but it was probably connected with criminal activity and fear that the law enforcement was on to him. His departure was followed by a subsequent manhunt and several failed attempts to lure him back across the frontier. Indeed, in one instance he was lured back by a member of the Norwegian resistance,

51 Dienstlaufbahn (Lars Blom) (NARA/BDC), *SS*-Stammkarte Hans-Caspar Kreuger (Author's archive), several documents in Olaf Jürgenssens *SS* folder. (NARA/BDC)

52 50:6/4 A, first volume. Article "Svensk Schalburgman får skadestånd". (RA)

53 Pryser, p. 390.

but managed to escape despite having been shot. Operating under several (*'Hauptmann Johannes Frank', 'Petter Erl'* and *'Wilhelm Roecker'*) aliases, he remained elusive to Swedish authorities.[54]

Calais (b.1899) was a former member of the *SSS* party but, according to ***SS-Obersturmführer* Bengt Hassler** who held a key position in the party, he had been excluded shortly before the flight to Norway. One of the most active Swedish agents, the police viewed him with interest. This was why volunteers with knowledge of his activities were thoroughly interrogated about the matter. Civilian employment within the *SiPo* and *SD* was held in lieu of formal *SS*-rank. **Calais** was, nonetheless, an important personage amongst the Swedish volunteers. From 1942 onwards, the majority of volunteers who signed enlistment contracts in Norway came into contact with him at the early stage. It was during visits to the *Ersatzkommando Norwegen* that they were told to make contact, which many did subsequently arriving at **Calais** home to be plied with alcohol and cigarettes. This was the first part of a considered to persuade them into revealing information concerning units in which the visitors had previously served and what kind of defenses they had seen while crossing the border.

Most volunteers refused, stating reasons such as that they had joined the *SS* to fight and would not betray their homeland, an attitude which, according to witnesses, angered **Calais**. In some cases, however, young volunteers like 17-year-old **Sven Alm,** revealed some information.[55] **Calais** also acted as interpreter and participated in the questioning of those not conversant with the German language.

The Swedish police also suspected that **Calais**, in addition to the these duties, also created a clandestine route – with the help of National Socialists residing near the frontier in the Swedish town of Arvika – for those wanting to join the *SS*. Volunteers entering *'Wiking' Division* in 1942 are said to have traveled by this method. It was also supposedly used to transfer intelligence from Sweden to Norway. As one volunteer subsequently revealed during interrogation:

> Calais had earlier been living in Arvika, where he had been the leader of a Nazi group (Lindholm). He had 11 months earlier illegally made his way to Norway. … Hired as accountant by Nordag, he was mainly employed by the *Gestapo*. From Calais, as he was convinced Stolpe [the informant] was a Nazi, the latter was told that a large gang in Sweden engaged in military espionage and propaganda activities on behalf of the Germans. Reports about this (amongst others concerning the military strength on the Swedish side of the border) were sent from Arvika to the frontier, where a man, whom Stolpe overheard being called 'Kåre Nilsen, residing close to Töcksfors, 6-7 kilometers from the border, forwarded the information into Norway and thus to Calais and the *Gestapo*.[56]

Calais' Norwegian activities ended in summer 1944. He instead found employment with the *Anti-Komintern,* a special department within the propaganda ministry that administrated anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns from Germany. He also acquired citizenship. His life ended in February 1945 when he was killed during a Berlin air raid in Berlin. The full extent of his activities has never been established.[57] Much effort was expended by the Swedish police after the war to make certain **Calais** had perished.[58]

54 Pryser, p. 123.
55 Report concerning Sven Anders Gustav Alm. 7.4.45. H.A. 116/44. (RA) and report Wednesday, 4.4.45. concerning Valter Fjellman. (RA)
56 P.M. 19.2.43. P4208. (RA)
57 Pryser, p. 123.
58 Interrogation with Olof Sandström. 5.7.45. P4151. (RA)

Previous association with **Calais** made every single volunteer who came in contact with him suspect of having acted as *SiPo-* or *SD*-agents. For example, **Gustaf Ekström** who worked briefly at the *Ersatzkommando Norwegen,* and **Patrik Mineur**, who visited Oslo while on leave from *'Wiking' Division*. No solid evidence surfaced in either case but, in fact **Ekström** traveled to Sweden with **Calais'** wife and was actually mistaken for being none other than **Calais** himself.[59]

While it is certain **Calais** was a traitor to Sweden, he had one contemporary who was the complete opposite. **Carl-Göran Edquist** claimed that he joined the *SS* with the sole intention of spying for the Swedish authorities. While the story remains questionable, he was subsequently able to present detailed information to the Swedish authorities in 1945. This corresponds with known events which he may have had prior knowledge of in order to fabricate a well-founded lie. It is, on the other hand, also possible he experienced the events on his own.[60]

Edquist (b. 1915) developed National Socialist sympathies while in school. Discharged after just one year of military service for a heart condition, he took up farming in 1932. He ended, with the introduction of the notorious Nürnberg laws in 1935, his involvement with the Lindholm Party. Transferring his loyalties to the 'Svensk Opposition', he resigned from this party for being to 'German minded'. **Edquist's** view was that he was nothing but a Swedish National Socialist and was disconcerted that the newspapers portrayed him as Nazi.

Sometime later he attempted to re-enlist in the Swedish army, but was rejected because of the previously diagnosed heart condition. Convinced his former political activities were being held against him, **Edquist** pondered he could do to clear his name. Writing to the Finnish military authorities during the Winter War, he offered to serve as a volunteer. Such actions clearly demonstrate his increased desire for military service. Indeed, he offered to fully equip himself and another volunteer without pay. Accepted for Finnish service, he was commissioned and served as a company commander within a Swedish-speaking unit. Following this, he returned to Sweden to manage several businesses. Still wanting to clear his name, he decided to infiltrate the German security service in order to pass information to the Swedish authorities.

It was with this mission in mind that **Edquist** left Sweden for Norway in late 1944. He was, after joining the *SS*, transported to Finland and followed retreating German troops into Norway. It was during this period that he forged documents promoting himself to the rank of *Wehrmacht Oberleutnant*. The deception recognized, he managed to replace the bogus identification with the correct (*SS-Obersturmführer*), by claiming the obvious error was a typo.[61]

Edquist came closer to his intention at the end of November after transfer to the nascent Finnish resistance network which was being formed by ***SS-Untersturmführer* Laqua** as part of the RSHA's *Sonderkommando Nord*. This new organization was to have ties with Sweden, and the idea was to place **Edquist** there as contact. At first it was planned to return him by boat, but this idea was abandoned. He then suggested making contact with the Swedish consulate in Oslo and, with their assistance, return home. His proposal accepted on 21 December, he informed consular officials about his intention to give up the network to Swedish authorities. The seemingly implausible story was later confirmed by a member of the consul staff. Promised a passport as soon as he could present a photo, his departure was delayed due to **Laqua's** absence over the holidays.[62]

First suspicions about his intentions arose during Christmas and New Year's. This occurred when **Edquist** spent time socializing with Swedish volunteers. He informed one of them, **Knut**

59 Memorandum on Wednesday, May 9, 1945 concerning Swedish citizen, engineer Gustav Hilding Sigvard Ekström and German citizen, widow Linnea Wilhelmina Ingeborg Calais. HA 909/45. (RA)

60 See note re. Edquist's story in previous chapter.

61 Interrogation with Carl-Göran Edquis. 25.9.45. (RA)

62 Ibid.

Posse, who just recently had joined the *SS*, that Germany was about to lose the war and he should return home instead of sacrificing his life for a hopeless cause. Another volunteer, **Tage Furugård,** suspected the intoxicated Swede of being a spy and had him arrested. **Edquist**, however, was able to contact the *Gestapo* who sorted out his release. They remained unaware that the suspicious **Furugård** had been correct in his actions.[63]

The resistance network would, nonetheless, be put on ice in the beginning of January and **Edquist** was flown to Germany to serve at **Otto Skorzeny** *RSHA* headquarters. See Chapter 8 for the remainder of his remarkable story.

There were, in addition to **Calais** and **Edquist**, other Swedish nationals serving within the Norwegian based *SD* and *SiPo* in a low-level capacity. **Thure Carlsson** was well-suited to carry out his SiPo tasks. A Swedish citizen and National Socialist born in Norway, he had been a member of *Den Norske Legion* between December 1941 and May 1943. Following this, he was employed as a *SiPo* chauffeur from November 1943, to February 1945. He also participated in raids against suspected state enemies, and transported prisoners and seized property. Sentenced in Norway to 6 years of hard labor after the war, despite what authorities deemed the technicality of his Swedish citizenship. He subsequently managed to escape and was never extradited.[64]

SS-Rottenführer **Tor Samuelsson** was another former volunteer serving with the Reich security services. Serving as a training camp instructor after sustaining a combat injury with *'Wiking' Division,* he was accepted into *SD* service in April 1944. Active in Fredrikstad, where he had previously carried out various assignments as an enlisted man, he disguised himself as a civilian to infiltrate the Norwegian society and participated in border patrols in order to meet couriers traveling across the frontier and bring them to *SD* headquarters. Following this **Samuelsson** served as guard at the Fredrikstad detention centre where he, at one point, participated in the brutal interrogation beating of a suspect. **Samuelsson** left his assignment and traveled to Oslo as the war drew to a close. While there he participated in the Norwegian national day celebration. Recognized the following day, he was detained and arrested.

Samuelsson's trial opened in April 1946. Charged with the beating of a prisoner, witnesses included former detention center prisoners who actually spoke of the defendant as a kind and respectful guard. Found guilty, he was sentenced to one year in prison. Arrested since May 1945, he was released for time served and no further actions were taken against him.

It was during an *SSS* party function in November 1944 that two Swedes destined for *SS* service became acquainted for the first time. **Walther Fjellman** and **Curt Stenberg** were born in 1919 and 1924 respectively. **Stenberg**, who had previously attempted *SS* enlistment and National Socialist **Fjellman**, who was about to lose his employment decided to join him to Norway on a second attempt. Together they left Gothenburg for Norway. Arriving at their destination on 22 November 1944 they were, following interrogation during which **Fjellman** related intelligence concerning Swedish regiments in which served, they were accepted. **Stenberg** remained in Norway as an *SD* radio operator while **Fjellman was** posted to the Graz for *Waffen-SS* training. He subsequently related to **Fjellman** that he served at a radio station close to the Swedish border that maintained contact with similar facilities in Finland, Germany and the Baltic states. The nature of these transmissions remains unknown. **Stenberg** survived the war and returned to Sweden.[65]

One of the last Swedish *SS* volunteer recruits was **Karl Axel Bodin**. Born in 1925, he had been a member of *Nordic Youth* and subsequently attempted to cross the Norwegian border in 1944. This first attempt having failed, he finally succeeded in March 1945. Suspected of concentration

63 Ibid.

64 *Norsk rettstidende* with the verdict from the trial against Ture Carlsson. 1946. (Author's archive)

65 Report Wednesday, 4 April 1945, concerning Valter Fjellman. (RA)

camp service, he is the only Swedish volunteer listed as a suspected war criminal by the Simon Wiesentahl Center. This was despite the fact that his service only lasted a few weeks. What is known is that he worked for the *SiPo* in Trondheim between the 24 April and 7 May 1945. Stationed at the Missionary Hotel, then in use as an interrogation center for captured resistance members, he participated in a police raid that resulted in two arrests and a brutal interrogation. Denying participation in the latter, he admitted during interrogation that he had beaten captives on other occasions under direct orders.[66] In order to return home, **Bodin** and another Swedish volunteer decided to steal a truck during which the latter shot and killed the driver. The Norwegian resistance in close pursuit, **Bodin** managed to across the Swedish frontier before surrendering to border guards armed with three pistols.[67]

***SS-Untersturmführer* Yngve Hellenborg** was also suspected of serving at Grini, the infamous Norwegian concentration camp. Certainly one of the most unusual volunteers, he was subsequently tried and convicted as a double agent. Having enlisted into the *SS* three times before, he achieved officers' rank by falsely claiming to have held a Swedish commission. A compulsive liar, he also claimed previous employment with the Swedish security services and aristocratic antecedents. The dishonesty and braggadocio made him unpopular among the other volunteers. His exact role at Grini has never been fully established. Crossing the Norwegian border for the last time, in December 1943, he was, according to himself, arrested and accused of operating as a British spy. Interrogated by none other than **Thorvald Calais**, he was transferred to Grini in May 1944 where, according to the testimonies of surviving inmates, acted as informant.[68]

Yngve Hellenborg (far right, lower row). (Geir Brenden)

66 Interrogation with Karl Axel Bodin. May 1945. (RA)

67 Ny Dag 19.5.45. (KB)

68 Letter from Royal Foreign Ministry to the Security chief. Stockholm. 8.9.44. (RA) and Report, Friday 19th of October 1945 to the Public Prosecutor of Värmland from Kriminalavdelningen in Stockholm. P3117. (RA)

SS Reiterei

The first Swedish *SS* officer and, as far as can be determined, the first Swedish volunteer was **Axel Holst.** Born in Sweden in 1891, he moved to Germany to seek that employment eluded him in his native land. His life there became something of a success story, **Holst** managing to acquire a large farm where he kept a dozen horses. He also won fame as a talented equestrian which is how he became involved with *SS-Reiterei* (*SS* cavalry).

Awarded the rank of *SS-Sturmführer* (later replaced by *SS-Untersturmführer*) within the *SS-Oberabschnitt 'Nord'* he was issued *SS* number 185012 in 1934. His actual function within the *SS* was nothing more than *Ehrenführer* or honorary officer. The promotion was more in recognition for his horsemanship and thus he became a means of recruitment propaganda.[69] **Holst** died during a riding accident in 1935. A memorial service, during which hundreds of dignitaries attended, was held in Berlin.[70]

Per Jarl (b. 1884) was another equestrian associated with the *SS-Reiterei*. Raised outside of the family following the death of his mother in 1885, his father emigrated to the United States not long afterwards. Unconfirmed information states that he served Germany during the First World War, whereupon he earned an Iron Cross First Class at the front. Employed as a riding instructor in Hamburg after the war, he was still there in 1939. His horses requisitioned for the war effort, he became the manager of a Pomeranian stud farm. Sometime around 1942/43 he became a civil employee of the *SS-Hauptreitereischule* in Munich-Riem. This facility was where the hundreds of horses for *8. SS-Kavallerie-Division 'Florian Geyer'* were trained for service. While there he became a personal friend of the Divisional Commander **Hermann Fegelein**, who later married **Eva Braun's** sister and was executed for treason in Berlin in 1945.[71]

Jarl, although still a civil employee, saw action twice at the end of the war. The first time he led a expedition to retrieve horses from Hungarian state stud farms threatened by approaching Soviets. The mission took one week of fierce combat. The escort, despite suffering heavy losses, managed to bring their charges to safety. The war ended while **Jarl** led the remaining Munich-Reim staff against US troops outside Munich. The hard-pressed cavalry group was forced to retreat and finally capitulate at Kurfstein on 8 May 1945. Returning to Sweden that autumn, he worked as riding instructor until his death in 1963.[72]

It is interesting to note that post-war trials labelled the entire *SS* as criminal organisation, with the exception of the *SS-Reiterei*. Thus **Holst** and **Jarl** are probably the sole Swedish *SS* volunteer to have escaped the status of war criminals.

69 *SS Dienstalterliste*.

70 Information provided by relatives of Axel Holst via Simon Olsson. 2009. (Author's archive)

71 Letter from Perl Jarl's son, 1.3.90. (Author's archive)

72 Letter from Perl Jarl's son, 1.3.90. (Author's archive)

11

Post-war Life and Consequences

Homecomings

The majority of the former volunteers were back in Sweden by VE Day (8 May 1945). As previously related, many of them – either resulting discharge or desertion – had returned to their former civilian status whilst the conflict played out. Some, finding themselves in the defeated Reich, tried to make their way home, while others were prisoners of war in Anglo-American or Soviet camps. Many of those captured would, however, manage to escape captivity and return home during the summer of 1945. Others, such as **Frans Wahlberg,** who in 1946 returned from a prison camp outside Leningrad and **Ragnar Johansson I** who was held prisoner by the Western Allies until 1946, returned in the years immediately following the unconditional surrender of Germany.[1]

Upon their return, most volunteers were brought in for interrogation by police authorities. These interviews have been the main source of this book and although not illegal for Swedes to fight in a foreign army, it was of great interest to ascertain whether or not they perpetrated any illegal activities such as espionage or illicit border crossings. In Denmark and Norway, *SS* volunteers awaited long sentences for collaboration with the enemy, while the only ones punished for their service in Sweden were those who emigrated without a passport, confessed to espionage or committed felonies in connection with their depature. **Erik Wallin,** who had fought with *'Nordland' Division*, was sentenced to prison. He deserted from his Swedish unit in 1943, dressed in a Swedish army uniform. The uniform had since vanished and the loss of governmental property was considered a crime worthy of confinement. His guards made no secret about his previous *SS*-service, which is why his skills as an amateur boxer came into good use to defend himself from the other inmates.[2]

The postwar police interrogations appear to have put an end to the upkeep of the majority of volunteer personal files. The war was over and there was no longer any fear they would act as a fifth column in the event of a German invasion. In other cases, files would remain active and were updated for several years, in some cases until the subject's death. In addition, many of the post-1945 interrogations were shorter than those carried out during wartime. In cases where the volunteer related information about war crimes, no follow up questions were asked. It was merely noted and no further action was taken to see if the man had participated. Indeed, investigators appear to have been more interested in decorations awarded during active service.

Not only did the Swedish police interrogate volunteers who returned, they also made enquiries concerning those who had not returned. This resulted in two different indexes (compiled March 1946), one for fate unknown and one for those believed to be killed in action.

The list of unknown volunteers featured 26 names. Of these, several were listed as having deserted and some was noted as probably killed, however, at least 10 would return from POW camps or hospitals throughout Europe. The list of deceased featured 17 names and was far more accurate

1 See Chapter 6 for more information.

2 Wallin, Hillblad, p. 272.

although the police had, as a matter of fact, missed several names.[3] In 1947 Norwegian police authorities sent their Swedish counterparts several documents from the former *Ersatzkommando Norwegen* concerning Swedish volunteers. While most of the information was of little interest, such as documents concerning the issue of *SS* uniforms others covered volunteer desertions from *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps*, and provided further interesting details on volunteer service. One file noted that **Karl-Olof Holm** had been captured and turned over to the special *SS* court in Libau for further measures – something which probably put an end to all speculations concerning his fate.[4]

Second Class Citizens

Even if it had not been illegal for Swedish citizens to serve in the *SS*, many felt they became something of second class citizens after their return home. As the many crimes committed by the organization became known, few wanted anything to do with those who had served in it. This is why some former volunteers had difficulties with adjusting to a civilian life and as a result, several subsequently left the country. **Erik Wallin** considered joining the French Foreign Legion. Having abandoned this dubious plan, he became a sailor and later found employment as a lorry driver in Afghanistan where he became close friends with the Emir and the controversial Soviet writer **Ilya Ehrenburg**.[5] **Wallin** later returned to Sweden, but others left the country, such as **Sven Alm,** who moved to Australia where he would live out his days until passing away in the 1970s. **Bertil Nässil** and **Nils Berg**, moved to the United States while **Carl Svensson** emigrated to Germany for work-related reasons during the 1960s. He remained there until his death in 2000.[6]

Three volunteers, **Heino Meyer, Hans-Caspar Kreuger** and **Thorolf Hillblad**, moved to South America. The battle-experienced **Krueger** was also employed by the Argentine Army as an instructor. It was in this capacity that he tried to recruit **Thord Bergstrand**, with whom he had served with in the *'Wiking' Division*, although the latter declined.[7] **Kreuger** was killed in an automobile accident at a railroad-crossing outside Buenos Aires in 1977. **Meyer** later moved to Spain where he managed a small factory.[8] Smuggling accusations were brought against **Gunnar Eklöf** and **Folke Nystrand**. It was said they actively assisted former volunteers to immigrate to South America. **Eklöf** was also accused of maintaining funds to help people flee Europe. Indeed, in a bugged phone conversation, they spoke of purchasing a ship for illicit trans-Atlantic crossings. For his part, **Eklöf** light-heartedly suggested that they should keep the money and dump the refugees overboard.[9]

A number of former volunteers managed to have quite successful lives in postwar Sweden. This was succinctly explained by the former ***SS-Rottenführer*** **Knut Fagerström**, who retrospectively surmised that the returning veterans often had a hard time finding employment. This left them with

3 Lists of Swedish volunteers in German service. 1.3.46. from Act: 50:6 / 4 A Nazism – 'Swedish-Nazi parties and abroad. Germany. *Waffen-SS* and other German military service'. (RA)

4 Fahndungsersuchen, Karl-Olof Holm. 25.1.45. *Ers.Kdo. Norwegen*. 50:6/4. (RA)

5 Wallin, Hillblad. Ehrenburg achieved some notoriety for his bloodthirsty 1942 article 'Kill' in which he urged Soviet soldiers to crush the enemy with the words 'If you kill one German, kill another – there is nothing more amusing for us than a heap of German corpses. Do not count days; do not count miles. Count only the number of Germans you have killed'.

6 Sveriges dödbok, Article in *Expressen* 1977 (KB) and letter from Carl Svensson/Stodenberg, 1.11.85. (Author's archive)

7 *Expressen* 1977. (KB)

8 Information provided by F. Meyer. (Author's archive)

9 Gunnar Eklöf police folder. P3592. (RA)

Depicted are Sven-Erik Olsson (right) and Heinz Harmel (left). (Göran Hargestam)

Heino Meyer photograph: standing to the far left is *Hauptsturmführer* Hans-Gösta Pehrsson. (Author's archive)

two choices: study or starting a business.[10] One former volunteer, **Per-Sigurd Baecklund**, quickly found gainful employment but discovery of his wartime past led to the refusal by co-workers to work with him.[11] Finding himself unemployed, he started his own business.[12]

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson also started his own Stockholm based company where would employ several former colleagues including **Elis Höglund.** It is also believed that he also assisted several Danish comrades by providing them with false passports and employment.[13]

Several who chose academic pursuits went into the medical field. **Lars-Owe Cassmer** of *SS-Art. Rgt 5 'Wiking'* and **Bo Wikström** of the *6./Rgt. 'Germania'* became doctors, while **Egoth Olofsson** pursued dentistry. The latter received his education during his time in the *SS*, but, based on a sanction for having performed what was described by medical colleague as the worst dental work he had ever seen, was not overly competent in his chosen profession. Another veteran who put his knowledge to good use was **Sten Eriksson**, who had served as a *Kriegsberichter* within the *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* and subsequently became a journalist.

Maintaining Contact

Some veterans kept in contact with each other, while others just faded into society. For some this was an active choice. They refused to talk about their service and wanted to forget why they cut all ties; others just lacked means of staying in touch. Amongst those who kept in touch this seems to have been primarily dependent on unit: In general, Swedes of *'Nordland' Division* seem to have been more proactive in maintaining contact than those of *'Wiking' Division* due in part to the scattering of personnel throughout the latter formation or for discernible geographical reasons. Many of those who resided in Stockholm became fast friends, even if unknown to each other during the war. A special bound grew between them by fighting for the same country.

Others were active, mainly those from *'Nordland' Division,* in veterans' organizations. Several former volunteers were frequent visitors at *Kameraden Korps Steiner* meetings and even had their own coordinator (**Sten Eriksson)** who served with *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* for a brief period during spring 1944.

It also appears that another Swede (***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Yngve Nordborg**) from *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* was active in post-war veteran movements. He was, according to police folder, involved in the creation of the *HIAG*, an organization which provided support for *SS* veterans all over Europe during the early 1950s. His political activism and maintenance of National Socialist beliefs ensured that police surveillance continued until his death in the 1970's.[14] A photo portrait – in which appears wearing an Iron Cross First Class supposedly awarded for knocking out two American tanks – taken after the war epitomizes the opposing nationalistic identities harboured by some of the volunteers.

Other veterans were simply *persona non grata* with comrades who wanted nothing to do with them. This group of perceived pariahs (**Kurt Birger Norberg**, **Yngve Hellenborg** etc.) was usually comprised of those who told lies about their service with the *SS*. Deserters, on the other hand, appear to have remained in good standing with former comrades. Indeed, **Elis Höglund,** who

10 *Expressen*, 1977. (KB)

11 P.M. from Inspector Ljungdahl, Stockholm. 9.8.45. XII 83/Ä 3806. (RA)

12 Information provided by relative of P.S. Baecklund who wishes to remain unnamed. 12.1.10. (Author's archive)

13 P.M. Stockholm October 15, 1947 S. O. Strömberg (RA) and Report concerning the chemist Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and vocal coach Yngve Gustaf Nordborg. 23.10.45. XII 83/Ä 3198. (RA)

14 Summary of Y. Nordborg's political activities, October 1969 – 12/5 1971. P2768. (RA)

Erik Wallin and Heino Meyer. (Göran Hargestam)

Some volunteers wanted to forget their wartime SS service; others kept decorations and photos as keepsakes. Folke Nystrand went a step further by having an SS uniform replica specially produced after the war. (Author's archive)

deserted from the *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* in 1944, described the relationship as a bit frosty at first, but this proved short-lived.[15]

Postwar Military Activities and the 'Stay Behind' Movement

The Cold War followed the Second World War in rapid succession. In convenient hindsight, most volunteers considered themselves as having fought to maintain Western culture and, as the West once again stood against the East, this belief, combined with the fact that Sweden with all likelihood would become a battleground if next conflict turned hot, several considered rejoining the Swedish army. While it is true that these soldiers individually and collectively held valuable combat experiences against the perceived future foe, they had also fought for a regime that was, for all practical purposes, a criminal enterprise. This consideration made certain they were granted no special treatment by the military authorities. **Gösta Borg**, who had been denied an officer's commission in 1943, volunteered his services as an instructor in 1948. Questioned about his *SS* service and current political beliefs, it was noted that: "On specific question, Borg states, that he is not connected to any Nazi movement but nevertheless he remains a convinced National Socialist". Unsurprisingly, he was never re-admitted into the army. Instead, he used his knowledge to write the book *The Red Mass Assault*, which was published in 1951. This volume, based on his wartime experiences on the Eastern Front, was essentially an instruction manual on how Sweden could defend itself against an invading the Red Army. While never achieving the status of officially adopted military handbook, it is said to have been quite popular with contemporaries.

Re-enlistment denials failed to discourage **Borg** and his former colleagues who wanted to prepare for action against a possible Soviet invasion. It was during the early Cold War years that the American OSS, later CIA, started organising resistance networks throughout Western Europe. These clandestine groups were to be ready for activation in the event of a Soviet attack. Known as the 'Stay Behind' movement, the first plans for a Swedish organisation was unofficial and had close ties to the Sveaborg organization and thus connections with the volunteers. Sveaborg's leader, **Otto Hallberg,** started making plans to resist as early as 1943, but interest waned after 1945. The Prague coup of 1948 and the consequent escalation of the Cold War led to a resurgence of interest in the shelved resistance scheme. **Hallberg** immediately started recruiting, and besides aiming for lower ranking officers of the Swedish Army, he was interested in engaging trustworthy anti-communists amongst whom were former volunteers that had fought in Finland and with the *SS*. The ultimate goal of the organization was to establish means of escape from Soviet occupation forces. During 1948-49 it was officially recognised by the US government, which promised arms, information and provisions through the offices of its Stockholm embassy.[16]

The Swedish 'Stay Behind' organisation would nonetheless grow too fast too soon, until government authorities, on discovery of its existence, had **Hallberg** arrested and charged with illegal assembly. During the search that followed, police discovered a full membership list, which shed light on the prospective order of battle; member '**Pinnér**' was acting platoon leader of the 'Northern Platoon', while **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** served as platoon leader for the so-called 'Southern Platoon'. **Pinnér** was more than likely **Ragnar Linnér,** who served with *'Wiking' Division* during the summer and autumn of 1941. Other identified members were **Bengt Rosmark** (*'Wiking'*), **Gösta Borg** (*'Wiking', 'Kurt Eggers')* and **Erik Wallin** (*'Nordland'*).[17]

15 Letter from Elis Höglund. 7.8.06. (Author's archive)

16 'The Sveaborg and the Stay-Behind'. Oscar Hedin. Stockholm University, 1995.

17 'Allo' allo eller varulvar? Nazisterna runt Sveriges (inte särskilt) hemliga armé'. Unnamed document, 2.6.53 "Pehrsson appears on the list of 'partisan group' members', which, in case of war, were to be at the disposal of

Hallberg was subsequently freed and all charges dismissed, but the damage was done and *Sveaborg* and its leader faded into obscurity. However, the official – but still secret – 'Stay Behind' organization was still taking on recruits, but whether or not ex-volunteers were enlisted remains unknown.[18]

One former *SS*-Officer readmitted into the Swedish Army was ***SS-Obersturmführer* Carl-Olof Wrang** who served with the Finnish Battalion of *'Wiking' Division* for several weeks in 1941. Considered to have been lured into *SS* service, he was allowed to continue his officer career. He later served as commander of the Swedish Airborne School in Karlsborg in the 1950s and led a UN Battalion in the Congo during the 1960s. He retired a Lieutenant Colonel.[19] Others participated in "refreshment exercises" which were mandatory for all former servicemen. During one such incident, ex-***SS-Hauptsturmführer* Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** was asked to deliver a lecture about his combat experiences against the Red Army.

Heino Meyer, who joined the *SS* in 1941 and 1943, did not complete his military service at the time. Conscripted in 1945, he appealed in writing to King Gustaf V for release based on previous meritorious service on the Eastern Front. The application was duly granted.[20]

Volunteers in Media and Memory

Anonymity was the fate of many ex-volunteers as they faded into society. Other than articles published during the war or shortly afterwards, there was little written about their collective history or individual experiences. **Erik Wallin**, in order to pay printing house debts of the *SSS* party, sat down with former *SS-Kriegsberichter* **Thorolf Hillblad** and related his wartime experiences. What started out as a series of articles in *Den Svenske Folksocialisten* soon grew into the unforgettable memoir *Twilight of the Gods* which was published in 1945. The narrative tells the story of *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11* from winter 1944 to the collapse of the Reich in 1945. The book sold well and cleared all accumulated debts; the second printing occurred many years later.

Interest in the volunteers resurfaced in the 1970s when a series of articles were published in the national newspaper *Expressen*. The first academic article was published in the Royal Army Museum's yearbook in 1986, but it was not until the decade of 1990's that the volunteer experience became publicly known with the declassification of the police documents on which this book is primarily based.

There are, unsurprisingly, no memorials to the volunteers in Sweden. There are, however, two in Estonia. The first, situated near Narwa, features the names of Swedes who fell in combat whilst serving with *'Nordland' Division.* The second is located just outside the town of Dorpat. Both were raised by private subscription.

Journey's End

There was, for a number of families, never any real information available concerning the ultimate fate of sons and fathers; they had, in most circumstances, simply perished in the flames of war. Others received official condolence letters relating they had fallen in action. On occasions these notices provided information about a grave family members would never have the opportunity

Swedish Army. The association came to light in the fall of 1950 and 'dissolved' in the spring of the following year. 1st XII 83 / Â 3198th. (RA)

18 'The Sveaborg and the Stay-Behind'. Oscar Hedin. Stockholm University, 1995.

19 Postwar letter from Carl-Olof Wrang. (Author's archive)

20 Letter from Heino Meyer to Gustaf V, 21.6.45. (Bosse B. archive)

to visit. Several volunteers were thus declared missing in action to be finally declared dead at the request of relatives in the decades following the war. In other cases, relatives contacted volunteers with whom the missing man had served. For example, the widow of **Arne Johansson** paid a visit to **Heino Meyer** in the fall of 1945 in order to learn the fate of her husband, who had been killed in Pomerania.[21]

Most of those who survived passed away between the 1970s and 2000s. Many found it difficult to settle into society. At least four, **Ulph Hamilton** of *'Wiking' Division*, ***SS-Oberscharführer*** **Robert Bengtsson** of *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler,* ***SS-Obersturmführer*** **Bengt Hassler** of *SS-Hauptamt,* and **Göran Svinhufvud** of *'Wiking' Division*, committed suicide. Whether or not the war had anything to do with their decision remains unknown, but it is certain that several were experiencing psychological problems prior to their deaths. Indeed, one of them admitted to having contemplated suicide several times before. Another volunteer, **Frans Sundby**, who appears to have served in the *SS* for just a few weeks in 1943, was rumoured to have taken his own life while studying at the officer training school of Karlberg. The motive was said to have been connected with the discovery of his foreign military service.

Some suffered from drinking problems which are said to have contributed to the early demise of three volunteers. Others, like **Tor Samuelsson** of *'Wiking' Division,* did not experience psychological issues and, as stated in a letter in 2005, that he missed the traveling associated with active service in the *SS*.

Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, the most famous of the Swedish volunteers, died of cancer in 1974. His erstwhile subordinate **Erik Wallin** passed away during a visit to Germany in 1997. He was laid to rest in Stockholm just 50 metres from the grave of his former company commander. At least two other volunteers – **Gösta Borg** and **Bo Wikström** – participated in the funeral service. **Borg**, now confined to a wheelchair, is said to have raised his right arm in a last salute to his deceased comrade. Most of the volunteers have, at the time of this writing, passed into history; only two or three remain alive to the author's knowledge.

21 Letter from Heino Meyer's brother, 17.11.96. (Bosse B. archive)

Conclusion

It might prove useful, the history of the Swedish *SS* volunteers having been presented, to provide the reader with a useful summing up. It is believed that approximately 180 to 200 Swedish citizens served with the *SS*. This book is based on available sources concerning 144 of them. Not all have been included in the text and some known volunteers, having been included in the book, have been excluded from the conclusion. Primarily serving with SiPo or SD, other cases amounted to such persons where the only information available was name and a date. What follows below is a summary of some of important and interesting topics. It would be an informative exercise to analyze the volunteers' motives, but space and varying motives – politics, work-related motives, family circumstances, the wish to fight in Finland, dreams of military careers and escape from punishment in Sweden – prevent this.

Previous Military Experience

Sixty volunteers were confirmed as having participated in the standard Swedish Military service as either NCOs or enlisted men, an additional 11 having served as officers either within the army or home guard. Of 71 total, approximately 23 deserted to join the *SS*, one seeking *SS* service to avoid a pending courts martial.

Other Voluntary Participation

More interesting than those who had participated in peacetime military service is the number volunteers who had previous experience of combat. Sweden, now having been at peace for at least two centuries, had however a large voluntarily participation in a number of foreign conflicts, mainly in Finland and during the Spanish Civil War. Amongst them were several who either later or previous came to serve in the *SS*. One volunteer – Gunnar Bergqvist – is confirmed as having served on the western front during the First World War where he was awarded the Iron Cross; one more volunteer with similar experience remains unconfirmed.

Franz Wahlberg, who joined the *SS* in 1941, is also said to have served in the Finnish Civil War in 1918, and then, two decades later, on the Fascist side during the Spanish Civil War. This makes him somewhat unique given that some 500 Swedish nationals are believed to have served in Republican international brigades; only 8 Swedes are confirmed to have fought on Franco's behalf.

Over 8,000 Swedes served in the Swedish Volunteer Corps between December 1939 and April 1940. Amongst them were about 41 who later came to join the *SS* including Wahlberg, who at the age of 39 voluntarily partook in his third war. It should, however, be noted that several of these volunteers never saw action, as many joined at such a late stage that they arrived at the front after hostilities ended. Some volunteers claimed that this was their motivation for joining the *SS*. With the so-called "Continuation War" in 1941, the possibilities to serve as a Finnish volunteer decreased – the screening process was harder, and while quite a large number of volunteers applied to join the Swedish Volunteer Battalion at the Hanko Front, only about 800 were accepted. Fifteen of these later came to join the *SS*, of which at least six also had served in the Winter War. In addition, at least one Swede served with the Finnish army unit prior to deserting to the *SS* during fall

1941. Two, both officers, actually joined the volunteer battalion following *SS* service. Carl Olof Wrang, who deserted to Norway and Åke Kretz, who was promoted to *SS Hauptsturmf*ührer during the spring of 1941, never experienced active service. Once again, several of those who joined the *SS* claimed to have done so after denial of enlistment in the volunteer battalion.

Following the return of the Volunteer Battalion in 1941, the Swedish Volunteer Company was raised after which it saw service from 1942 to 1944. Some 400 volunteers served with this small unit, 40 of which were killed in action. One of those fatalities, Harry Raab, had served as an *SS* officer for several months in 1941. Five came to join the company prior to *SS* service, and an additional three were discharged from the *SS* in late 1942, without seeing combat. Instead, subsequent transfer to the volunteer company followed.

Politics and Party Membership

Given the fact that the *SS* was a political/military organization under the aegis of National Socialism, it is not surprising that many Swedish volunteers sympathized with its ideology. National Socialism was never popular in Sweden, the parties representing it divided into smaller organisations. The two largest were the *SSS* under Sven-Olof Lindholm and the eponymous "Furugård" party under Birger Furugård. Eschewing participation in the elections of 1940, earlier involvement occurred during 1932 and 1936, receiving approximately 15,000 votes in and 20,000 votes respectively. This should be compared with the total number of votes: in 1932 it is believed that some 2,500,000 people voted, and in 1936 2,900.000. Thus general Swedish support for National Socialism seems to have been about 0,6% in 1932 and 0.69% in 1936. Of the 144 Swedish *SS* volunteers examined for this section, 95 are confirmed as having been party members or sympathizers either prior or during their service, which means that about 66% admitted to having sympathized with the ideology. Not surprisingly, the number of National Socialists amongst volunteers exceeded by far the general Swedish population.

It is therefore quite plausible that amongst the remaining 49 volunteers were several who sympathized or were party members that were overlooked by police authorities. It would be impossible to keep track of everyone, and those 95 were likely volunteers who admitted to having been politically active and/or sympathizers who had their political activities documented.

Many however do not claim this to be the primary reason for their wish to serve in the *SS*. Several claimed of have been unable to find a civilian employment because of political believes or motivation related of denials of military careers in Sweden. Moreover, 12 self-proclaimed National Socialists admitted to having lost all interest in the ideology during subsequent *SS* service. Indeed, 2 became left wing sympathizers, 3 claimed to have embraced communism, 2 deserted and 1 was discharged.

Recruitment Year and Ending Year

Presented below are figures concerning how and where Swedish volunteers joined the *SS* and what year their service ended. By "ended", I mean those who were sent home, deserted and killed. The numbers might differ from the total amount of 144 volunteers used as basis for this conclusion since personal particulars are lacking for some of them.

The first Swedish volunteers joined the *SS* during the interwar years. Four joined during the 1930's. These were however Swedes who residing abroad. It was not until after the creation of *'Nordland' Regiment* that the number of volunteers increased. Fifteen joined prior to the Barbarossa in 1941. Two were Swedish citizens born in Norway and one had both Swedish and German citizenship, enlisting in Germany where he lived. The rest all joined in Norway. The primary increase of volunteers came after Barbarossa, which is comparable with all other western and northern

European countries who contributed volunteers. It is thus clear that most wanted to fight the Soviet Union and not against the Western Allies. Following the invasion, between the 22nd of June and the 31st of December 1941, 40 Swedes joined the *SS*; 17 in Norway and 18 in Finland, 2 in Denmark and 3 in Germany and Austria. The same year 12 left *SS* service of which 2 rejoined later.

In 1942 an additional 31 Swedes joined, of which one (Yngve Hellenborg) rejoined for the second time. Twenty-four of these enlisted in Norway, 1 in Holland, 1 in Finland, 4 in Germany and 1 whose origins remain unknown, but possibly joined in Denmark. However, 20 also left the *SS* – including 16 of those who had enlisted in 1941.

As the war turned in favour of the Allies during 1943, there were still Swedes willing to participate on the German side. As a matter of fact even more enlisted than the prior year – 37 total: 12 in Finland and the remainder in Norway. Of these volunteers, three (Meyer and Hellenborg) rejoined for the second time and Hellenborg rejoined for the third time at the end of the year. In addition to Meyer and Hellenborg, a further 27 volunteers, of which 21 had joined the *SS* in 1941-42 – terminated their service in 1943.

By 1944 it was clear that Germany would be forced to capitulate. Nevertheless, approximately 20 Swedish volunteers enlisted with the *SS*, one of which joined for the second time. Once again, most (16 total) enlisted in Norway, 1each in Denmark, Germany and Poland respectively and 1 of unknown origin. What is of interest here is that, given how the conflict was going, *SS* enlistment in 1944 would appear to have been an overall poor proposition. Despite this nine volunteers enlisted during the fall and winter of 1944! Thirty-one volunteers left the *SS*, five of whom joined the same year, and 26 who had joined previously.

While it might appear strange that Swedes would join the *SS* as late as 1945, some certainly did, but numbers were the lowest on record. Indeed, only 3 were willing to risk life and limb for a lost cause, only two actually entering active service. The third (Hjalmar Scholz) applied for enlistment by correspondence and was promoted to *SS Hauptsturmführer* without entering German sovereign territory. The remaining two decided to enlist in March 1945 when VE Day was only weeks away. That same year the service ended for the last 51 volunteers who joined the *SS* prior to 1945. Of these, 2 joined during the 1930's, 17 during 1941, 7 during 1942, 9 during 1943 and 16 during 1944.

End of Service

Several of the Swedish volunteers died during their *SS* service. The first to be killed in action remains unknown; his loss is mentioned in a *'Wiking' Division* document from September 1941 but he remains unidentified. The first known Swede to be killed in action was Hans Lindén who served with *'Wiking'* and expired in hospital in late 1941. Following his death, another 17 Swedes was killed in action. During 1942, 3 volunteers within of *'Wiking'* lost their lives, 1 in hospital and two in the field. In 1943 three more from the same Division died, again 1 in hospital and 2 in the field. In 1944, following the creation of *'Nordland' Division*, 4 Swedes (of which one served as officer) died during the combat in the Baltic, one was killed whilst serving with the *'Nord' Division* in Finland, two with *'Wiking'* and one – the sole Swedish national to fall on the western front – serving as a war correspondent in Normandy. Between March and May 1945, the last 3 volunteers to be confirmed as killed died on the Eastern Front, two during the battles in Pomerania and the last while fighting in Berlin between the 1 and 2 May 1945.

In addition to these confirmed fatalities, 5 were reported missing presumed killed; three in 1944 and 2 in 1945. There were also those who lost their lives by non-combat related circumstances. Axel Holst died during a riding accident in 1935. During 1944 1 died of sickness and 1 was more than likely executed by the German field police. During the last year of the war one died during

an American air raid and one was murdered in Berlin. Four who deserted to the partisans in 1943 must also be included, as they were never heard from again.

Deserters

As the reader might have already discerned, several volunteers deserted during their service. The first occurred in 1941 when Åke Forsell was permitted to visit Sweden during a short period of leave and never returned. He was followed in 1942 by Åke Lindquist, who deserted in a similar fashion. In 1943 the number – 10 in total – increased. Five from *'Nordland' Division* to partisans in Croatia, of which 1 managed to make his way home. The remainder either deserted while on leave or from training camps; all managed to return to home. During 1944 desertions increased when 12 Swedes decided to try to make their way home. Seven of these deserted from the front whilst serving with *'Nordland'*; all but 1 managed to reach Sweden alive. The 7th was captured and more than likely executed by the field police. Two deserted from *SS-Pz.Gren.Ausb.u.Ers.Btl.11* in Graz while engaged in combat with partisans, actually joined them to fight the Germans. The remaining 3 deserted either while one leave or prior to entrainment for the front. During the last months of the war, another 8 deserted. They had all reached the same conclusion on how the war's inevitable outcome and wanted to save themselves. One deserted while on leave in Denmark in January 1945, another when his unit, the Norwegian Ski-Ranger Battalion, had withdrawn from Finland to Norway. A few more requested to be sent to the very same unit, using the opportunity to escape over the Swedish frontier. Finally, there were those who deserted while in Germany; 2 managed to return home, whilst the 3rd took shelter in Berlin's Swedish church before being killed during an American air raid.

At least 32 (22 %) of volunteer Swedish nationals deserted; none deserting from the front served with *'Wiking' Division*. This can be explained by the fact that the Division served nowhere near Sweden. *'Nordland' Division* fought in the Baltic throughout 1944. Its close proximity to Sweden via boat ensured that deserters could return to a still neutral nation where the Reich authorities had no chance of tracking them down.

Captivity

Risk of capture, especially by the Red Army, was a volunteer's greatest fear. Most feared immediate execution for the myriad crimes committed by the *SS* in the east. Sixteen Swedes fell into the hands of the enemy during 1945; 4 from *'Nordland' Division* were captured by the in Berlin. All but 1 managed to bluff their way out or escape. One however was interred by the British when he was about to return home. Subsequently released in early 1946, he was 1 of 12 captured by the Western Allies. All of the Swedish POWs survived, including those arrested in Norway following the capitulation.

Discharge

The most common reason for termination of *SS* service was discharge. About 70 of the volunteers were discharged for a variety of reasons. In some cases there is uncertainty why a volunteer was discharged, but the most common reason was their own request after being wounded. Twenty-one are known to have been discharged for this reason, however, one refused to follow through and remained until he was subsequently killed in action; 4 later re-enlisted. There were also several that requested immediate discharge, but failed to have it approved. Five were discharged on their parents' request, one twice due to familial appeal. Eleven were discharged as physically unfit for service, including those deemed too weak or those considered politically unreliable. Similar to this

category were an additional 8 who were arrested for various crimes. Three, 1 placed under arrest for homosexuality, 1 convicted of theft and one accused of spying, were eventually permitted to return to service; the remainder were imprisoned until the end of the war. Three were allowed to return home after contract expiration, 1 was released to study at university and 4 were transferred to Finland. Moreover, a group of 4 were released from contracts during the last weeks of the war; the reason for these discharges remains uncertain.

Units & Combat Involvement

As most volunteers served within frontline units of the *Waffen-SS*, it is of interest to determine many actually saw frontline action and with what units. Several were also transferred between different units, and thus also saw action with several. The two major in which volunteers served was *'Wiking' Division* during1941 – 1943, and *'Nordland' Division* during 1943 – 1945. Within the former Division between and its training unit (exclusive of those who in 1943 were trained to serve with *'Nordland'*), a n approximate total of 63 served. Not all engaged the Red Army in combat. Some only saw action against Yugoslav partisans. Thirty-seven are known to have served on the Eastern front, with an additional participating in anti-partisan warfare. Two more served as medics at Klagenfurt Camp, but the remaining 19 never finished basic training.

There were 38 volunteers and 18 Estonian-Swedes In *'Nordland' Division* during 1943 and 1945. Here we will only focus on Swedish nationals, since information concerning the latter is scarce. Given the fact that the Division as such was deployed for anti-partisan warfare, a much larger percentage of volunteers saw action. Conversely, Reich authorities were not as keen to grant discharges as they were in 1941-42. Twenty-five serving with *'Nordland'* saw action against the Red Army, of which 7 were veterans from other formations. Six only saw action against partisans in Croatia, and one only served during the initial stages of organization during summer of 1943, after which he served with *SS-Panzer-Brigade 'Gross',* where 3 Swedes served. All served with *'Nordland' Division*, but only 2 saw action against the Soviets prior unit disbandment.

'Nordland' Division was a part of *III. Germanisches SS-Panzer-Korps*, and its replacement unit was the *SS-Pz.Gren.Ausb.u.Ers.Bat 11*. At least 13 Swedes served with this latter unit, which despite being a replacement unit saw action against partisans – no exact number is known but 1 was subsequently transferred to *'Wiking' Division*'s, and two whom were unlucky enough to remain at the camp in April 1945 became a part of the makeshift *Kampfgruppe 'Schweitzer'* – both have been listed as missing ever since.

The third most important frontline unit for Swedish volunteers was *SS*-Mountain Troop Division 'Nord'. This unit was never intended to be a volunteer formation like *'Wiking'* or *'Nordland'*, but several minor Norwegian units were absorbed into it. Twelve volunteers served ithin the Division and its component foreign units. One served as an instructor, Of the remaining 11, 7 or 8 saw action against the Red Army, of which one was killed. The last group consisted of volunteers who were transferred to the Norwegian Ski-Ranger Battalion during the last weeks of the war in order to avoid being killed in Germany.

The Swedish volunteers, not having any units of their own, also served in other units in small numbers. Two served with *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*. Three served with volunteer legions *Den Norske Legion* and *Freikorps Danmark*, Three more served with *Totenkopf-Division*, but it remains uncertain if any actually saw action. Finally, within the *Nederland, Nibelungen, Frundsberg*, an *SS*-Brigade and an *SS*-Cavalry Regiment, there were an additional 5volunteers who more than likely saw action.

Swedish war correspondents of the *SS-Standarte 'Kurt Eggers'* held a somewhat ambiguous position. Never intended to be combatants, some participated in the fighting. Approximately 10 volunteers served as war correspondents, with 4 having combat experience mainly the *'Wiking' Division*.

Amongst those not intended for frontline service were Swedish non-combatants within the *SS-Hauptamt*, *Allgemeine-SS* or *SiPo/SD*, of which 19 have been included. Several were transferred from combat formations.

Ninety volunteers that actually saw combat. The remainder either failed training or held such rear echelon assignments. As this section only features known *SS* volunteers, one can safely assume that many of the others never arrived at the front. Those who served as intelligence agents and with brief *SS* service have been excluded.

Ranks and Decorations

Another topic worthy of examination is volunteer ranks and decorations. At least 26 obtained the rank of *SS-Untersturmführer* or higher including one who actually exchanged forged commission documents for authentic ones. Four reached the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer*, which conformed there place as the highest ranking volunteers, however, only two saw active service. Ttwo, Åke Kretz and Hjalmar Scholz, never saw active service. Gunnar Bergqvist and Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, who served in the *Allgemeine-SS* and the *Waffen-SS* respectively, were active commissioned officers. It is possible a single volunteer actually served as and SD *SS-Sturmbannführer*. His identity, however, remains unidentified.

Eight reached the rank of *SS-Obersturmführer*, and the remaining 14 reached the junior officer rank of *SS-Untersturmführer*. Conversely, 5 who were present at the *SS Junkerschüle Bad Tölz*, did not obtain commissions due to failure to complete training or war's end.

Eleven commissioned officer volunteers served as officers or officer candidates in the Swedish army or Home Guard. Half saw action – 5 were war correspondents, 2 of which had previously served with in *'Wiking' Division*, while the remainder served as standard frontline officers. Amongst the other half were those who never left Sweden, one doctor who might have served near the front, six non-combatants and three who were granted early discharge.

Twenty-one served as NCO:s, of which 17 served at the front either prior to or after promotion, however; 1 participated only in anti-partisan warfare.

While no Swede was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, there were 2 – Hans-Gösta Pehrsson and Sven-Erik Olsson – considered to be highly decorated. The former was awarded the *Ehrenblattspange des Deutsches Heer* in December 1944. The latter earned German Cross in Gold in 1945. Several more volunteers earned the Iron Cross, the classic German award for bravery. Twenty-five, Including Pehrsson and Olsson, received the award. Some, however, remain unconfirmed. Five were awarded the Iron Cross First Class. The number of other decorations remains unknown. Several received a variety of assault and wound badges. Those who participated in the fighting during winter of 1941/42 was awarded the *Ostfront* medal and at least 4 received the Close Combat Clasp.

Appendix

Swedish National Insignia and *SS* Service

Determining whether or not *SS* soldiers were German born or foreign is often simple. Several units and nationalities had their own specially designed collar tabs or flag sleeve patches. The reason for this was two-fold; some "non-Germanic" units were forbidden to wear the *SS* runes, but it was also in order to provide some sort of national self-identity even if this was, more often than not, illusory. For some, like the tiny band of British volunteers, it was of great propaganda value to show the volunteers were actual British nationals. Thus they had specially designed collar tabs with the three lions, a cuff title with the words *Britisch Freikorps* and the Union Jack on their sleeves.

Swedish volunteers however, often resembled their German *SS* comrades. There was no officially issued national insignia available to them. Some sources claim that ad hoc field insignia was worn. For example, an *SS-Pz-Aufkl-Abt 11* officer claimed that Swedish company commander **Hans-Gösta Pehrsson** proudly wore a blue and golden cross on his sleeve. It is also said that **Gunnar Eklöf** presented Swedish sleeve shields to members of his sabotage company. However, this remains unconfirmed, as neither photographs nor original insignia has materialised since 1945.

A sleeve flag insignia may have been officially contemplated. Indeed, the *SS-Hauptamt* (main office) rendered a European map on which diverse – Swedish inclusive – national insignias were displayed. It was, however, also noted that the Swedish flag was not being worn or even manufactured.

There were, nevertheless, a few volunteers who wore non-regulation (awards, badges, medal ribbons, etc.) insignia denoting previous military service. One known example is the so-called Hanko Clasp, a specially designed badge worn by those who served in Finland, featuring the readily identifiable 'three crowns'.Others wore Swedish army insignia. Period photograph examples show volunteers with an indigenous sports badge that also featured the three crown motif. Members of the *SSS/NSAP* party were also known to sport political badges such as the *Sveaborg* organisation's prized membership badge.

Hans-Caspar Krueger served in *SS-Standarte "Kurt Eggers"*. This picture was taken whilest participating in a war correspondent training course. Note the Swedish Army sport badges. (NARA)

Bengt Hassler during officer training at Bad Tölz. Note the ribbon bar for his numerous Finnish military award and Protection Squad (*SA*) membership badge. (Geir Brenden)

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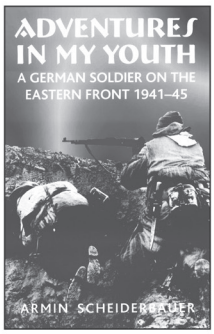

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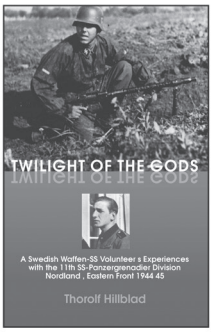
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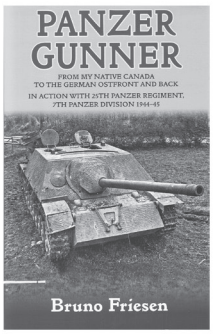
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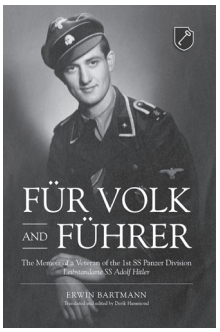

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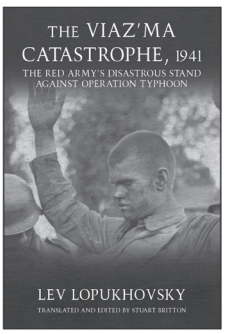
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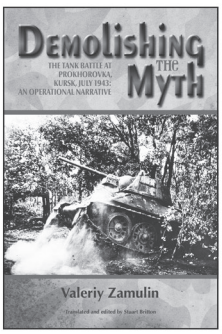

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